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Special Japan issue
Previewed: Vexx, Ryz
RalliSport Challenge,
Barbarian, Jedi Starfig
Reviewed: Jet Set R
Future, Virtua Fighte
Herdy Gerdy, Genma
Onimusha, PSO ver.
Plus: The making of...





The future of electronic entertainment



If, like **Edge**, you believe Japan represents the most appetising of the three videogaming territories, then you've probably hungered for this issue since **E**1.

Sure, for the last eight years, **Edge** has dined on the Japanese gaming scene: uncovered the latest software; served up unrivalled insight into this nation's development society; endeavoured to transmit the remarkable uniqueness of its culture via a menu of show reports, interviews, softco visits – even reviews. Yet, in terms of communicating the intricacies of the average Japanese gamer's existence, these have been mere hors d'oeuvres – nutritional glimpses into a videogaming community not many western players would feel confident claiming an ability to properly digest. The main course, as those who live there will tell you, can only be ordered by the legitimate gourmet.

Which is why, since 1993, **Edge** has been watching its diet: savouring flavours; accumulating knowledge; happy to pile on the kilograms (this month's extra girth can be entirely blamed on a pagination increase, however). And which is why **E**108 finally sees the magazine's first concerted attempt at conveying what being part of Japan's gaming community is really like. East is Eden, a fascinating read on this very theme and one of the magazine's most heavily researched features to date, starts on p52.

For those worried that tucking into a 12-page exposé on the above may seem like a recipe for indigestion perhaps an apéritif in the form of Rising Sun (p68), an account of how Japan became the planet's most revered electronic entertainment provider, might get your juices flowing.

Everyone else can concentrate on dessert: a selection of Japan-themed content spread over the various sections of the magazine, exquisitely covered in exclusive artwork from Susumu Matsushita, of 'Weekly Famitsu' fame (see FAQ, p108).

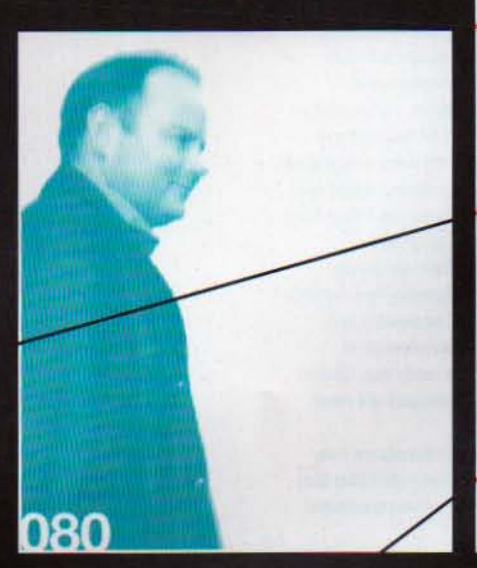
When delivering his initial sketch (below), Matsushita-san clarified the illustration's conceptualisation. The way he sees it, Japan stands alone amid the global videogaming community, fighting on both the hardware and software creation fronts. Just as there's John Bull spirit in the UK, he argues, there's samurai spirit in Japan, so why not depict a samurai facing off the worst devils the west has concocted over the years? In London. As far as the blonde beauty is concerned, it would be interesting to hear your interpretations – we certainly have ours.

Which just leaves enough space for some thought gathering over coffee. Hopefully, you'll enjoy this themed issue – it's a project the present editorial team has been keen to undertake for a while now. Ultimately, it's staggeringly difficult to truly convey the passion Japanese gamers demonstrate towards their pastime. Japan is videogaming's heartland. A nation where videogaming is socially accepted.

Itadakimasu.



Features



068



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"Have you ever heard of ninjutsu, sir?"
"What?"
"Ninjutsu – the secret art of assassination."
"Yes, of course I have."


NINTENDO
GAMECUBE

Europe finally gets GameCube

Details of May 3 European GameCube launch dominate Milia 2002, though UK retailers refuse to follow Nintendo's pricing recommendations







David Gosen, managing director, Sales and Marketing of Nintendo Europe used Milia 2002 in Cannes to confirm the European GameCube launch strategy

Nintendo has finally put an end to months of speculation by announcing that the European launch of the GameCube will take place on May 3. The announcement was made via an Internet Webcast on January 28, with the first public confirmation arriving at Milia 2002, the interactive content and electronic distribution exhibition that took place in Cannes from February 4–8.

In a move that represents a marked commitment to the region, Nintendo is making a million units available across Europe at launch, and said that there will be 20 software titles available for the console from day one. Significantly the company also announced that the unit will feature a 60Hz RGB mode, and will be priced competitively at €249 (£150). Software will retail at €60 (£40). Details of the GameCube launch were accompanied by a statement that the recommended retail price of the Game Boy Advance would be reduced worldwide with the European price dropping from €129 to €99 (£80 to £60). This price drop is already in effect.

It wasn't all good news though. For a start, the impact of the initial Webcast was diminished thanks to the launch details being leaked in advance – allegedly because the company's Website was hacked into. Later, at Milia, the rather disingenuous listing of titles such as *Sonic Adventure 2* as exclusive to GameCube also failed to win any plaudits from industry pundits. But the real setback came in the weeks following the initial announcement, which saw several reports that UK retailers will not be following Nintendo's pricing recommendations, with the unit instead likely to sell for £170 or more in this country.

David Gosen, managing director, Sales and Marketing of Nintendo Europe refused to assign any blame to retailers. "The final price is always set by retailers, and the retailers will decide what margin they want to make," he said, talking to **Edge**. "We expect in European countries that €249 will be the end retail price – in France, Germany, Spain and Italy. The UK sits outside the Euro and retailers will have to decide an appropriate price for the UK. The UK is a very competitive market and some will price higher and some will price lower. That's a free market economy for you."

Nevertheless, after last issue's exposé of retail practice, it's another example of retailers calling the shots. It will be of paramount importance for the success of GameCube in the UK that Nintendo earns the support of retailers, and it's hardly promising that they are already refusing to tow Nintendo's party line. Particularly given that the announced launch date gives Microsoft a seven-week head start in which to promote the more expensive Xbox, which is already being readily thrust

Nintendo is making a million units available at launch and said that there will be 20 software titles available for the console from day one



GameCube launch line up

The Following 20 titles will be available for GameCube when the console launches on May 3:

Luigi's Mansion (Nintendo)
WaveRace: Blue Storm (Nintendo)
2002 FIFA World Cup (EA)
Batman (Kemco)
Batman Vengeance (Ubi Soft)
Burnout (Acclaim)
Crazy Taxi (Acclaim)
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX (Acclaim)
Donald Duck Quack Attack (Ubi Soft)
ESPN Winter Sports (Konami)
Gauntlet Dark Legacy (Midway)
ISS2 (Konami)
NHL Hitz (Midway)
Sonic Adventure 2 Battle (Sega)
Spider-Man (Activision)
Star Wars Rogue Leader (LucasArts)
Super Monkey Ball (Sega)
Tarzan Untamed (Ubi Soft)
Tetris World (THQ)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (Activision)
Universal Studios (Kemco)

upon consumers by the majority of high street retailers.

But Gosen remains optimistic that the later date can be turned to his company's advantage. "All of Nintendo's managing directors across Europe are working with retailers to ensure that the product gets the prominence that it deserves. It's quite interesting that a number of retailers have pointed out that the gap between Xbox and GameCube allows them to focus on Xbox for 6–8 weeks and then focus on GameCube after that. I know the media loves to create this console war because it sells magazines but we really don't see ourselves as direct competitors of Microsoft or Sony, because as I've said before, they are technology-based companies, while we are a games-based entertainment company operating in a different field."

Whether or not consumers see things this way is another matter, but it was clear from the company's stand at Milia that Nintendo intends to leave the sparse release schedules of the N64 era behind it. "One of the advantages of launching a little bit behind Japan and the US is that we've got titles ready for us. Our release schedule will be more consistent than it was for the N64. We're going to launch *Luigi's Mansion* and *WaveRace: Blue Storm* on day one. Three weeks later we're going to launch *Super Smash Bros. Melee* and *NBA Courtside 2002*. Three weeks later we're going to launch *Pikmin*. Then there's the summer, and come Q3, which will be September or October, we'll look at *Eternal Darkness* and *StarFox Adventures*, and then *Mario Sunshine* for Christmas. That's a pretty good line-up for the first six or seven months of a console, even excluding *Resident Evil*, which could be June or July, and other titles from EA and Acclaim."

Certainly the GameCube's software line up is one of its strongest assets, and the Nintendo stand was one of the highlights of Milia, lending a welcome videogame feel to an exhibition that sometimes draws criticism for a lack of focus. It was by far the busiest stand at the show, and even featured Sonic Team's Yuji Naka, on hand to demonstrate the GBA connectivity of the GameCube version of *Sonic Adventure 2*. While Naka-san talked of GameCube offering the 'right fit' for Sega's mascot, Gosen was keen to highlight this functionality as a unique selling point. "Connectivity is one of the unique assets that we have, and in that respect we will be promoting it very heavily," he stated. "More and more games will be coming to market that utilise that connectivity and that Gaming 24:7 that will change the gaming experience. It's a major differentiator."



biggest advantage as a videogame exhibition is that it is one of the best places to find out what people within the industry think about the latest industry developmen – simply because so many important peop are in attendance.

Rather predictably, given the assortmer of technological disciplines that were present, the actual show itself proved most useful for those interested in iTV and

There are few other occasions in the videogam calendar that can boast Jez San OBE astounding pundits with mind control tricks

Elsewhere at Milia, the event proved more substantial than just the exhibition; after all, there are few other occasions in the videogame calendar that can boast Jez San OBE astounding industry pundits with sleight of hand and mind control tricks into the early hours of the morning. Apart from its unhurried pace, which contrasts starkly with events such as ECTS and E3, Milia's

wireless gaming. THQ, Kuju and Denki all had a presence at the Digital Bridges stanc while companies such as PlayJam and Tw Way TV also benefited from the convergence of technologies represented. Indeed the relative paucity of conventional videogame publishers and developers that were exhibiting provided an opportunity for a host of companies to take advantage of. Companies such as Terraplay, demonstrating a cross-platform PC-versus PS2 karting game; Tribeka, which was ther to discuss its intriguing digital fulfilment system which enables retailers to manufacture software and packaging in store; personalised avatar creator Digimask CPU manufacturer, Intel; *3ds max* creator, Discreet; and copy protection specialist, Macrovision. And even though they weren' exhibiting, the attendance of Telewest and the Global Underground record label was also noteworthy.

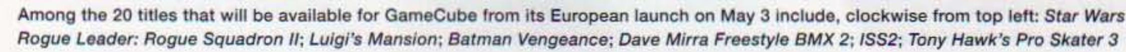
Notable absentees included Microsoft and Infogrames, a normally stalwart supporter of the show, while Sony's presence was fairly muted and the presenc of the likes of Ubi Soft and Microids was restricted to a relatively meagre showing of French domestic titles. Likewise, developer Eutechnyx, demonstrating a fairly impressiv prototype of a *Chase HQ* remake was pret difficult to find. But, as with the most recen ECTS, there was a relatively strong showin from eastern Europe and Korea, with











Among the 20 titles that will be available for GameCube from its European launch on May 3 include, clockwise from top left: *Star Wars Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II*; *Luigi's Mansion*; *Batman Vengeance*; *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2*; *ISS2*; *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*







When the unit launches in Europe, it will be available in two colours; indigo and black (below). Elsewhere at Milia, the Game Developer Village once again showcased a rich array of coding talent



companies such as eSofnet and 1C demonstrating a range of titles that, though derivative, were a testament to the untapped coding talent that exists outside the major videogame markets.

And once again, the Game Developer Village proved to be a wildly varied mixed bag, throwing up one or two surprises. Successful entrants varied from experienced but as yet unsigned developers, such as Affinity Games which was showing off several wireless titles that have already been signed to wireless publisher nGame, to amateur programmers, like Olivier Zegdoun, whose PC project *De Profondis* hinted at significant coding talent.

But the real highlights of Milia were the think.tank summit talks that preceded the main event, and simply the opportunity the event provided to savour the rumour and gossip that abounded on the show floor and in the bar of the Hotel Martinez. The most interesting, though unconfirmed, rumour that reached **Edge**'s ears stated that Rare's *StarFox Adventures* is to be released on platforms other than GameCube – which would certainly be a surprise given Nintendo's involvement with the *StarFox* brand.

But aside from rumour and hearsay, the think.tank sessions provided more grounded discussion. NTT DoCoMo's Takeshi Natsuno proved a remarkably vivacious orator during his keynote address, in which he highlighted the major differences between the Japanese approach, which has prompted the exceptional uptake of the iMode wireless standard, and that of Europe, which has merely taken a few faltering baby steps towards successful wireless networking technology. His main observation was that the western obsession with technology was at the expense of providing the end user with interesting content. Elsewhere, the most notable conclusion of the Screen Digest's market forecast session was that – as was reiterated in several other think.tank sessions – broadband is still a fairly long way away from being a reality, with it not expected to make a significant impact until some time around 2005.

The keynote address by THQ's Brian Farrell proved heavily oversubscribed, and though he proved a little too ready to promote his company's own products, was also of interest; thanks largely to a quick straw poll that he conducted half way through the presentation. When asked which console would dominate the current generation, attendees were overwhelmingly in favour of PS2, with 66.5 per cent voting for Sony's machine, 26 per cent for Xbox, and only 7.5 per cent for GameCube.

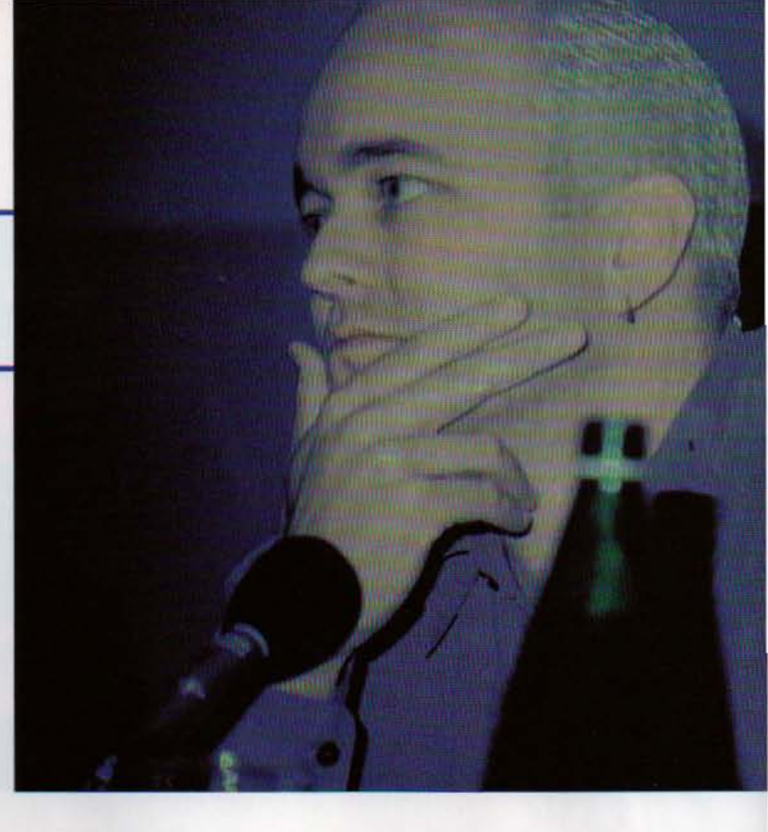
The most interesting session was entitled 'Take the Risk, Raise the Money', chaired by Revolution's Charles Cecil, which explored the financial alternatives open to developers. It reflected the current interest being shown in the videogame industry by the financial community, as well as the growing maturity of the development community – both also reflected in the presence at the show of Tiga, and the fact that for the second year running, the DTI was subsidising British Companies to attend Milia. Particularly telling was the testimony of Kalisto's Nicolas Gaume, who recounted his mainly negative experience of relying on financial markets. The discussion that followed, regarding completion bonds – essentially a promissory bond that provides an alternative to relying on publishers to take on the financial risk of developing a videogame – was more optimistic.

Despite the strength of the think.tank summits though, the attendance of the overall event was apparently down against last year, and it was difficult not to feel that the actual amount of videogame content at the show was likewise reduced. It is to be hoped that this doesn't mark a diminishing interest in the event as a whole, because Milia is, in **Edge**'s opinion, a unique and welcome event in the videogame calendar.

Broadband is still a fairly long way from being a reality, with it not expected to make a significant impact until some time around 2005



Nintendo's presence at Milia 2002 added a welcome focus on videogames to the mix of broadband networks, iTV, mobile phones, copy protection, and digital fulfilment stands



Xbox: online plans revealed

General manager of Xbox, J Allard, reveals more details about the console's imminent UK launch – and its online gaming potential

While most dedicated gamers in Europe are salivating at the prospect of playing *Halo* come March 14, Microsoft will have a much harder time convincing the majority of PS2 owners to switch to Xbox. But with a successful US launch under the company's belt, **Edge** caught up with Xbox general manager, J Allard, to discuss details of the machine's European unveiling, his vision for online gaming and Bill Gates' penchant for *Fuzion Frenzy*.

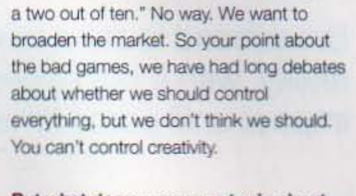
How many titles will be available at launch and can you assure us that there will be no slippage?
Yes, March 14, no slip. The good news is that demand is through the roof. The bad news is that demand is through the roof. We can't make enough.

Can you give details about the launch line-up for Xbox, and if *Jet Set Radio Future* is to be a launch title?
If *Jet Set Radio Future* is not a launch title, there will be another one. As for the Xbox, our manufacturing plant in Hungary is producing 1.5m units for the launch. We don't have numbers for every territory, but if you don't get one on day one, like the US, we are looking to replenish on a regular basis. From a company perspective, we have not announced yet what the allocation will be like everywhere.

Although you have titles like *Halo* and *Dead or Alive 3*, there seems to be a slew of poor games coming out on Xbox. Does this worry you?
We are looking to deliver a different type of gameplay. Does it worry us that there will be poor games? Yes, it does, but at the same time half the publishers themselves will tell you how powerful the Xbox is.

But will you have QA in place to ensure that really atrocious titles don't come to the market?
Quality, yes; gameplay, no. There's no accounting for taste. I've read some reviews of *Fuzion Frenzy* that have just been abysmal, where people have just slammed it to death. The chairman of Microsoft loves that game. He loves that game more than any other videogame experience he's ever had. He talks about *Fuzion Frenzy* every single opportunity he gets. People's taste is different and I think if you scrutinise the game with the hardcore mentality you'll never get the casual gamers. Most gaming publications won't give it a ten out of ten. We could have said, "We are not going to ship that thing because a publication gives it a two out of ten." No way. We want to broaden the market. So your point about the bad games, we have had long debates about whether we should control everything, but we don't think we should. You can't control creativity.

> "The good news is that demand is through the roof. The bad news is that demand is through the roof. We can't make enough"



But what do you propose to do about Sony's headstart? Although many hardcore gamers will buy into Xbox, aren't there just too many customers satisfied with their PS2s?
That's not necessarily our goal. We take the argument that 50 per cent of the world isn't playing videogames right now. If we just go capture them, we would surpass Sony because they are not going to get the 50 per cent that play our videogames. That's a silly numbers game to play, but what we are trying to do is grow the market and be as successful as we can. I think games like *Halo*, *Gotham* and *DoA3*, which launched in the US, have demonstrated that we have the superior platform. The potential is all there to take us to the next level. Frankly, the market is big enough for all three consoles to do well. I will not be a failure if I do not surpass PS2's numbers. Nobody looked at us in the US and said, "Gee, well, you didn't have as many consoles on day one as PS2 did – you're a failure."

You've made many announcements about the online component of Xbox. Can you outline your vision?
The vision of online is to take gaming forward in a very natural way, so there's a whole slew of things you can pick up on the videoclip [shown at CES in January]. One is a single identity that spans all the games. You have one online identity that spans the online community and everyone knows who you are. The next thing we did was add voice. Voice is required in all online games because it's just a natural extension whether you're playing cooperatively or competitively.

Imagine a football game without the players being able to speak with each other. Imagine Schumacher lapping at Silverstone and not being able to speak to his pit crew. It's impossible to compete effectively. Voice will be built in, although there will be a masking capability so you can mask who you are, or have an appropriate voice. You will also be able to do invites across games.

When will the online service launch?
It's going to launch when the games are ready. Right now, our vision is that we will launch worldwide simultaneously. But it will definitely launch this year. We have 27 publishers now, committed to doing online titles. The libraries are now out to developers and the servers are up and running. The genius of consumer electronics in general is what you don't do, and how simple things are. But that simplicity comes at a cost to the manufacturer. We have more people working online than we have working on the console. Just to give you a sense of scale.

Square showed its PlayOnline video nearly two years ago and the PS2 still hasn't come anywhere near to matching that vision. Won't people be sceptical about your claims?





Jet Set Radio Future (left) will not be a European launch title for the Xbox (a release date of March 29 has been set). Thankfully, *Halo* (centre) will be on the shelves day one, but Microsoft must be cautious about poorer titles flooding the market, such as *Azurik* (right)



Xbox launch games

At the time of writing, Microsoft has yet to confirm the thirdparty launch line-up.

Firstparty
Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding
Dead or Alive 3
Fuzion Frenzy
Halo: Combat Evolved
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee
Project Gotham Racing
RalliSport Challenge

Thirdparty
Championship Manager: Season 01/02 (Eidos)
Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex (Universal Interactive)
Dark Summit (THQ)
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 (Acclaim)
F1 2002 (EA)
Mad Dash Racing (Eidos)
Max Payne (Take2 Interactive)
NBA Live 2002 (EA)
Shrek (TDK Interactive)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (Activision)
TransWorld Surf (Infogrames)

The Xbox philosophy had online built in from the beginning. That was always our dream. That's why we put in the hard drive and broadband. It's why we put the second slot in the controller. It was designed for a voice peripheral on day one. We know that a developer will only target what's in the box. We wanted every developer to be able to count on its capabilities. We didn't want to force gamers to accessorise.

The official US controller seems to be universally disliked. Are you planning on bringing out the Japanese controller in Europe?
It's an opportunity. We're here to serve the gamers, and the publishers and the retailers. If people tell us that's what they want, we will do it. I prefer the official controller myself, having played a lot of *Halo*. But we will make [the Japanese controller] available if that makes market sense. We are totally flexible on this. We had to listen to gamers. We visited 5,000 homes and put it in the hands of 5,000 gamers.

What would you say to the PS2 being better value for money, considering that once you've bought a couple of Xbox games, some extras and a DVD controller the Xbox almost doubles in price?
Halo.

But *Halo* isn't a massmarket consumer game, is it?
Well let's talk about the casual consumer in the US. The Microsoft brand resonates well with them. *Fuzion Frenzy* has done well by them. They like the fact that there are four controller ports at the front, because they want to play with their whole family. They like the fact that there's an extension cord built into the controller cable, so they don't have to buy an additional one. They like the fact that the DVD playback software is of sufficient quality that they don't have to worry about purchasing a DVD player. Casual gamers, actually, really do find the Xbox appealing.

And we haven't even targeted them yet. We've only just begun with the launch and we're really focused on the hardcore. I think online is going to change that radically. We're going to broaden the portfolio to bring in the casual gamer over the next year-and-a-half or so. We'll broaden the appeal of our ad campaign and our awareness as well. More importantly, we're going to offer online experiences. You can imagine being able to play online 'Trivial Pursuit' and games like 'Monopoly'. Games that bring the family back together without the complexities of the PC. I think it's going to do wonderful things for bringing non-gamers to consoles. The price doesn't hold back the hardcore, but it will hold back the casuals and we have to drive that down.

"The Xbox had online built in from the beginning. That was always our dream. That's why we put in the hard drive and broadband"



industryopinion

Edge asks the industry for its first impressions of Xbox

I'd like to see Microsoft create something massively multiplayer for the network, but move away from the standard fantasy/sci-fi RPG model that's currently flooding the PC market. I don't know how many console gamers will pay for a gameplay experience that chiefly involves killing tiny gerbils and chopping trees over and over again. They have a fantastic opportunity to grab massively multiplayer as a concept and wrench it into the massmarket. A truly inspired, simple experience with a strongly supported community could be something that gives them a strong USP over and above what its rivals are offering.
Ben Cousins
Intrepid CE

Since our first Xbox games haven't really been suitable for network multiplayer play, we don't yet have any firsthand experience of Microsoft's online strategy. No one else that I've spoken to seems to know much about its future plans for online gaming, though, and that makes developing an online game risky, both commercially and artistically. Why build games that you're not sure your publisher wants? The peer-to-peer matching of *Gamespy Arcade* seems to be a good starting point, but innovative games that really exploit the potential of online play will need something more, it seems.

However, I can understand not wanting to forge ahead with an online plan right now. There's no proven business model for the intersection of online and console gaming, and the PC has probably already cornered that part of the market which does exist. The Xbox seems an obvious platform with which to bridge that gulf, and I'm looking forward to finding out which way Microsoft jumps.
Anonymous designer

Warhammer Online concentrates very much on the community aspect of online gaming. This means that communication is a central theme of the game. Without a keyboard, Xbox developers of online games such as ours are going to need to find some clever ways to get around the problem. Of course, there can be many ways to input text using a standard Xbox joypad. Predictive texting and standard phrases can make joypad input user-friendly. We could also consider voice messaging or voice-to-text translation or other, equally ambitious methods. Ultimately, however, games will need very careful crafting to ensure that all users on the same server, whatever their input method, are playing the same game on equal terms.

Also, upgrading games with live content after launch is going to be challenging. The MMORPG genre has grown up around PC architecture, where it's easy for the developer to offer large patches and content additions via download. The Xbox hard drive makes this feasible but in a less expansive way.

Both of these issues really only affect the creation of existing games on the Xbox platform. As the machine matures as an online platform, games will evolve that are aimed specifically at its architecture and where the full and final game comes in the box that you buy. The Xbox provides a cheap and powerful online gaming platform that could open up this area of the market to a very large number of new players.
Paul Carruthers
Climax Online

No one should underestimate the importance of Xbox having the hardware to facilitate online play from day one. History is littered with examples of add-on hardware that either failed because it was priced too highly, or didn't get the support of massmarket games because it wasn't guaranteed to be available to all consumers who'd bought the device.

The online potential is therefore far more likely to be an integral part of Xbox titles. Certainly in the US, where cable-modem take-up is high, this is going to make for games that put *Ultima Online* and *Everquest* in the shade. Incremental content, user-responsive content, appointment-to-play events, these will become the norm and, suddenly, the sterile human-vs-computer game will become little more than training for the real world of videogaming – the type of gaming that will include communities from all over the world.

Microsoft has to be careful not to try to control the content too much, but to allow it to flourish, from wherever it might spring. It will take people from the most unusual sources to provide the New Entertainment. Yes, Xbox looks and feels clunky, but it has exceptional power, connectivity from day one and the awesome might of Microsoft's marketing machine behind it.
Shahid Ahmad
Start! Games

Amstrad em@iler plus keeps full spectrum of gaming alive

New home networking device resuscitates retro classics for a new generation to enjoy

At £99 the em@iler plus is a bit more expensive than a secondhand ZX Spectrum, but it is network ready

Amstrad aims to introduce a whole new generation to the joy of Spectrum gaming, thanks to its new piece of cutting edge hardware, the em@iler plus. The device, which has just been released, is essentially a cheap network ready device that, for a cost of just £99, is capable of sending email, accessing the Internet, sending SMS messages, and conducting secure Internet transactions. Several adverts, taken out in trade papers over the last few months, had prompted conjecture that Amstrad was about to bring out Spectrum titles for handset devices such as mobile phones and PDAs, for next-generation consoles.

Although ZX Spectrum emulation isn't the device's only selling point, Amstrad hopes that it will benefit from the current surge in popularity of retrogaming that has also seen developments such as the rerelease of Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner* on Game Boy Advance by Jester Interactive and GAME's decision to sell older consoles such as the Jaguar.

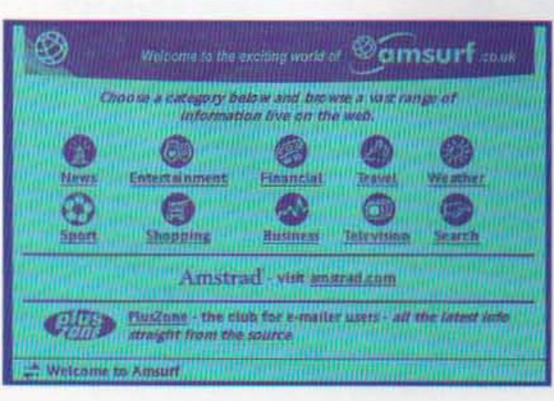
Edge spoke to **Simon Sugar**, Amstrad's commercial director, to find out more about the device, which will be available from high street retailers.

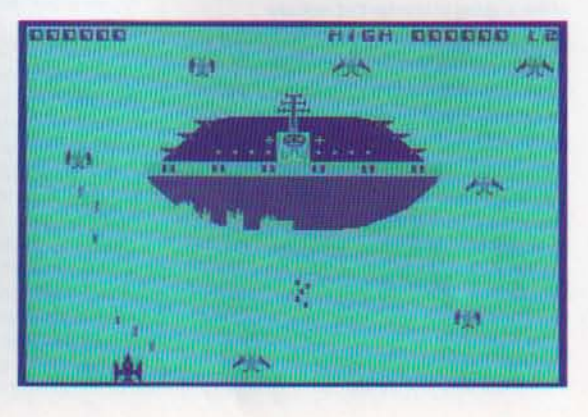
Why were the Spectrum licenses acquired?

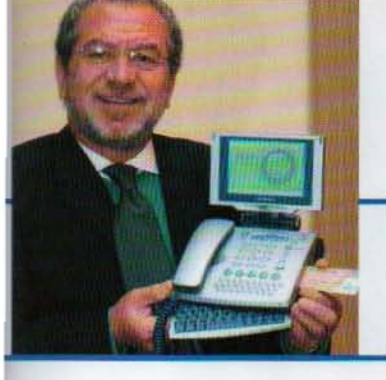
Amstrad Plc is the owner of all Sinclair intellectual property, including all the Sinclair operating systems. With the new screen and the easy to use QWERTY keyboard it was clear that we could place a Spectrum emulator into the new em@iler plus and offer the user the ability to download and play classic Spectrum games. With gaming's ever increasing popularity, we felt it was time to celebrate the roots of what exists today. The industry has come a long way and retrogaming is proving extremely popular, with an increase in demand that looks set to continue.

What is your overall strategy for the em@iler plus?

To get Britain online, emailing and playing games by providing the quickest, easiest and most cost-effective way to send email, access the Internet, download and play Sinclair Spectrum games, send electronic greeting cards to PCs and send SMS messages to mobile phones. Plus we wish to provide all users with the ability to have







Amstrad's Alan Sugar proudly displays the new em@iler plus, but not everyone will have a gold card for online shopping

secure Internet transactions on their home phone in the future – hence the built in smartchip card reader which we will remotely enable on all em@iler plus units via a software download at a later date.

Can it really compare with other access devices, such as PCs and STBs?
At £99, it is set to be a huge hit with consumers. It is the cheapest and simplest way to get use email and get online. It is also smaller and much more suited to home use as it is generally positioned in an easy access area of the home, such as a lounge or dining room. In addition it doesn't infringe on the television viewing habits of the user or require the relatively long log on times of a PC.

How successful has the original em@iler been for Amstrad?
The original em@iler has proved very successful, meeting our sales forecasts, allowing us to understand user habits and subsequently decide to launch and promote the next-generation em@iler plus.

extensive library, including some extremely popular titles. We will monitor the popularity of games and update them as appropriate, on an ongoing basis.

Do you have any plans to use the Spectrum licences in any other way – by making the titles available on other platforms, or remaking them for current videogame consoles, for example?
We are currently restricted from talking about this due to NDAs that we have signed – sorry.

How does the process of playing these games actually work?
You simply press the dedicated games button to bring up a series of categories: Arcade, Shoot 'em up, Platform, Adventure, Simulation and Strategy games. You are given a list of games available under each category, simply select the one you want, download, read the instructions and enjoy.

How many games can be downloaded at once and how much will it cost to play them?

"We saw the opportunity to incorporate a facility to play Spectrum games. Our target audience remember the games from when they were launched, and can't wait to play them again"

Was any market research undertaken to determine the extent of brand recognition for these old games, or to determine their current appeal?
Amstrad has been aware for some time of a resurgence in the appeal of retrogaming. Retrogames are in popular demand and this can be seen by the number of searches for them on Internet search engines as well as the amount of discussions taking place in chat rooms, gaming Websites, etc. When we decided to launch the em@iler plus we immediately saw the opportunity to incorporate a facility to play Spectrum games. Our target audience remember the games from when they were originally launched, and can't wait to play them again.

What Spectrum titles will be available over the em@iler plus?
We will launch with 25 titles from our

The games are measured in blocks and the em@iler plus can hold 35 blocks in total. The amount of games you can download depends on the games chosen but ranges between two and five blocks. Games are downloaded individually. To download a game costs 12p for one hour and 50p for three days.

How does Internet browsing work using the em@iler?
The em@iler plus uses Microsoft Mobile Explorer, which is specifically designed to display low graphic content sites. Other Websites may also be viewed, but due to their complexity, may offer limited access. The em@iler plus also has a dedicated 'Amsurf' homepage which offers many categories and a large selection of useful links to popular Websites.

CUTTINGS



Sony to benefit from Argonaut's Malice
Sierra and Argonaut, have confirmed that *Malice* is set to appear on PlayStation2. Despite the fact that the title had previously been held up by Microsoft as an example of the superior technological capacity of the Xbox, both versions will be launched next autumn, with the PS2 adaptation apparently containing additional levels and unique gaming options. Meanwhile Argonaut has finalised the acquisition of Particle Systems, the 40-person Sheffield-based development studio currently working on *EXO* (previewed in **E**98). The acquisition will be funded by £2.4 million in cash or equivalents and £3.5 million in Argonaut shares.

SN Systems gets cubed
SN Systems, a Bristol-based independent games software tool producer, has announced that its *ProDG* suite has been launched for use with Nintendo's GameCube in Japan. The announcement comes after 18 months of working closely with Nintendo, and builds on the company's successful N64 toolset. For more information visit SN Systems' Website at http://www.snsys.com.

Interplay and BioWare reach agreement
Interplay and BioWare have announced an end to their long running dispute, having reached a settlement that will see BioWare's *Neverwinter Nights* published worldwide by Infogrames subject to certain pre-existing Interplay licences. Commenting on the agreement, BioWare's joint CEO, **Ray Muzyka** stated, "We're delighted that we have reached an amicable settlement agreement in our dispute with Interplay." BioWare continues to develop *Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic*, which will be published by LucasArts.



EA uses alienbrain
The latest version of NXN's digital production management software, *alienbrain 5.0*, is to be used by Electronic Arts to manage forthcoming development projects. The software, which was featured in **E**99, will be used across all of the company's internal studios, including EA Canada, EA Redwood Shores, Westwood Studios, Maxisand EA Tiburon, following successful trials during the development of *NHL 2002*.

Hulk smashes onto consoles
Marvel Entertainment seems to be adopting a bit of a Gatling gun approach to taking over the box office, what with a profusion of high profile comic book movie adaptations such as 'X-Men' and 'Spider-Man', which means that a raft of videogame conversions will inevitably follow. The latest celluloid Marvel superheroes to be given the multi-platform silicon treatment are 'Daredevil', which will be turned into an action-adventure title by *Dragon's Lair 3D* publisher, Encore, and 'Incredible Hulk', which is to be published by Universal Interactive.

Konami acquires stake in Genki
Konami Japan has announced that it is to acquire a stake in Genki, the developer of titles such as *Kengo*, *Wangan Midnight* and the Dreamcast version of *Daytona USA*. Konami revealed that it had purchased a 37.24 per cent stake in the company for ¥315 million (£1.7m) in a deal that's expected to be completed by the end of March.



Difficult times for ATEI expo

Samurai sword devices, turret towers and pool cue peripherals did little to lift spirits at the annual Earl's Court arcade expo





Konami's *Tsurugi* (top) and *Perfect Pool* (above) were among the only real novelties on offer this year – though both had twitchy motion-sensing technology

An abundance of youthful 'buyers' wearing off-the-peg suits and cheap aftershave in a single room can only signify one thing: the Amusement Trades Exhibition International. Taking place at Earl's Court from January 22–24, the event was the industry's chance to showcase the year's most impressive examples of coin-operated entertainment. In reality, the event's ability to highlight arcade innovation has been eroded year on year by increasingly elaborate gambling paraphernalia.

Amid the sea of billiard tables and *Shenmue*-style dart games, the stalwarts of coin-op entertainment were still present. But the acres of floorspace once demanded by Sega, Taito, Namco and Konami was severely reduced this year. A situation the companies are struggling to come to terms with, due to the ever widening gulf between the quality of the arcade experience and home videogame entertainment. The absence of Midway only compounded the feeling that the arcade industry is limping slowly towards extinction, at least in Europe.



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This was evidenced in the increasing move towards coin-ops which are marrying gambling and the videogame experience together. The most innovative example of this was Konami's *Perfect Pool*, which uses a cue peripheral with motion-sensor technology to translate your table skills to the videogame arena. However, some question the wisdom of delivering shaky motion-tracking, a steep learning curve and a club-like peripheral in a single package. Indeed, after a few plays, most players are likely to come to the conclusion that playing pool on a normal beer-stained pub table is a much more satisfying experience.



Dodgy suits and the whiff of cheap aftershave are becoming more prevalent than decent arcade games at ATEI. Hopefully, next year will throw up some better coin-op experiences

Reasons to be glum

In terms of new arcades, Namco's *Turret Tower* offered the most stirring experience. Certainly, the Perspex booth containing a spinning central column (in which you're strapped into a chair) grabbed more attention than the mundane *Smash Court Tennis: Pro Tour, Tekken 4, Invasion Assault* and *Gun Survivor 2 Code: Veronica*. Although graphically weak, the game's central premise – of defending a military base from the tower installation – gave the manufacturer the opportunity to induce thrills and nausea in equal measure.

There was little reason to be cheerful over at the Konami stand either, which included many familiar experiences. Although the excellent *Silent Scope EX* impressed attendees, it added little to previous iterations. The monster truck title *XTrial Racing* was little better, combining shallow racing, crazy rooftop environments and shaky visuals. Only *Tsurugi* attempted to innovate with its samurai sword peripheral. The virtual sword works with motion-sensing technology, giving you the opportunity to strike down streams of opponents with thrusts and slashes. But erratic motion-tracking left many cursing their peasant opponents.

Sega still had a large presence, but most of its floorspace was taken up by the likes of *Wild Riders, The King of Route 66* and *Virtua Athletics*. A row of *Club Kart: European Session* machines was well stocked with attendees, but apart from introducing a novel credit card system seemed to offer nothing inspiring. Even *The Maze of the Kings*, Sega's new lightgun title set against the colourful backdrop of tomb-raiding in ancient Egypt, failed to set pulses racing.

Overall the event merely underlined the difficult market conditions many coin-op manufacturers face. While the situation is less disheartening in Japan, it is becoming increasingly clear that many of the companies that built their reputation on vigorous and entertaining examples of the form are increasingly turning to Xbox, PS2 and GameCube to deliver their kicks to the punters.

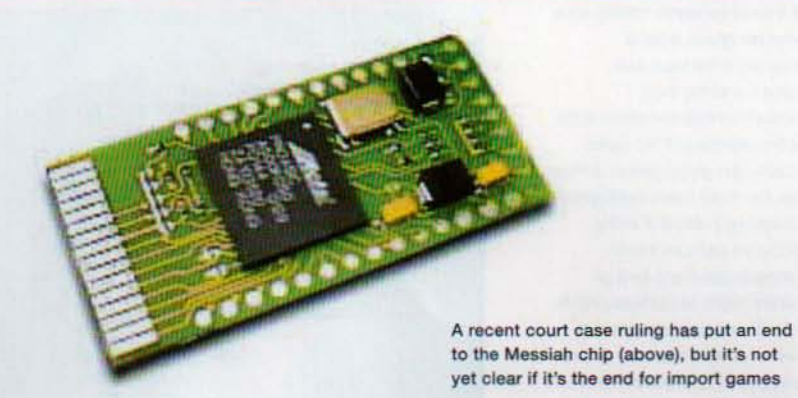
Sony wins anti-piracy court ruling

But a UK court ruling against Newport-based Channel Technology could have unforeseen implications for the legality of import gaming

A recent court victory by SCEE against a Newport-based mod-chip manufacturer has raised concerns regarding the legality of import gaming in the UK. The mod-chip manufacturer, Channel Technology, was found liable under the Copyright and Patents Act 1988, because its Messiah chip enabled the unlawful circumvention of Sony's copy protection schemes. Sony was awarded £45,000 costs and £15,000 in damages, and Channel Technology was forced to stop selling the chip. But while the court case ostensibly centred on issues of copy protection, the ruling by Judge Robin Jacob has also cast doubts over the legality of import gaming.

The court case was a culmination of a concerted effort by Sony to crack down on PlayStation mod-chip manufacturers. While Channel Technology chose to contest Sony's legal proceedings, arguing that the chip was not specifically designed to allow copied games to be played, other companies threatened with legal action, such as Playstationmods.com, decided to comply with Sony's wishes. But the confusion over the implication of the court ruling stems from a comment by Judge Jacob in which he argued that Sony's regional licensing schemes prohibited the use of games outside the territories for which they have been licensed – which may also have implications for importing DVDs.

But while Channel Technology has argued that the ruling makes it illegal to play import software (though still theoretically legal to buy), lawyers acting for Sony have argued that the judge's comments simply expressed his personal view, rather than a court finding. Nevertheless, a similar argument is currently taking place in Australia, with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) contesting Sony Computer Entertainment Australia's attempt to have new provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 applied to prevent the use of mod-chips. ACCC chairman, **Professor Allan Fels**, stated that Sony's move "is an attempt to lock out Australian mums, dads and children from the enjoyment of legitimate products they have bought. Sony Computer Entertainment is moving, in this particular case, to prevent Australian consumers from reaping the benefits of globalisation."



A recent court case ruling has put an end to the Messiah chip (above), but it's not yet clear if it's the end for import games

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Frequency	PS2	SCEA	In-house	8
Super Mario Advance 2	GBA	Nintendo	In-house	8
Maximo	PS2	Capcom	In-house	7
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	PC	EA	2015	7
Sonic Advance	GBA	Sega	Sonic Team	7
Tekken Advance	GBA	Namco	In-house	7
Final Fantasy X	PS2	Square	In-house	6
MotoGP 2	PS2	SCEE	Namco	6
Vampire Night	PS2	Namco	In-house	5
Wipeout Fusion	PS2	SCEE	In-house (Studio Liverpool)	5
Azurik: Rise of Perathia	Xbox	Microsoft	Adrenium Games	3
Kabuki Warriors	Xbox	Crave	Lightweight Entertainment/Genki	1



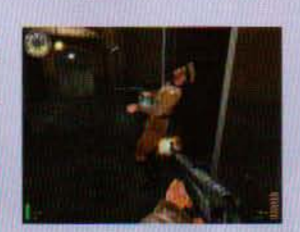
Frequency, supremely fast and hypnotic rhythm action from SCEA



Super Mario Advance 2 isn't the best game ever, but it comes close



More former gaming glories are relived in Capcom's *Maximo*



The atmospheric *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* brings WW2 to life

CUTTINGS



Official Xbox magazine launches

To coincide with the UK launch of Xbox on March 14, the Official UK Xbox Magazine launches on February 28, featuring 132 pages of reviews, news, features and tips. A covermounted DVD is also included, featuring four playable demos, a host of game trailers, and exclusive interviews with some of the creators of the console. Boasting insider knowledge, but editorial independence, the magazine claims to be the next best investment you can make after getting hold of an Xbox.

Xbox launches in Japan

By the time this issue of **Edge** reaches you, Xbox will already have launched in Japan, along with 12 launch titles. At a press conference in January, Hirohisa Ohura, managing director and head of the Xbox Division at Microsoft Japan, announced that the following titles were to accompany the console's launch on February 22: *Jet Set Radio Future* (Sega); *Genma Onimusha* (Capcom); *Silent Hill 2: Saigo no Uta* (Konami); *Double-S.T.E.A.L.* (Bunkasha); *Air Force Delta II* (Konami); *Hyper Sports 2002 Winter* (Konami); *ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding 2002* (Konami); *Nobunaga's Ambition: Chronicles of Chaos* (Koei); *Nezmix* (Microsoft); *Tenku: Freestyle Snowboarding* (Microsoft); *Project Gotham Racing: World Street Racer* (Microsoft); and *Dead or Alive 3* (Tecmo). A further 22 titles will be available by the end of March.

Dreamkey 3.0 announced

Sega has announced the release of *Dreamkey 3.0*, which will replace the company's existing Dreamcast browser software. From March 1, Dreamcast owners will only be able to access the Internet using the new software, which will be available from the company's Website at www.sega-europe.com. The software will allow users to choose any available ISP to connect to the Internet.

www.lobaltech.com

Thinking outside the box

Lobal Technologies' pioneering approach to artificial intelligence could help create smarter game opponents, as well as innovative control systems

The learning process

American linguist Noam Chomsky first conceptualised the LAD, the Language Acquisition Device, as the human brain's innate capacity to handle language. Naturally, this is partly dependent on the brain's physical structure. "We agree with Chomsky that there is an intrinsic structure," adds Professor Taylor, "but what we think his model is missing is the necessary fine-tuning. The brain is an amazing all-purpose system, but it requires a lot of fine-tuning. We have modifiable systems in our LAD, and one of the basic architectures is the action network. So operating in an action-based environment, the system can learn."

This is one of the key features of Lobal's neural network approach. Its LAD prototype can learn correlations between inputs which always come together, and can learn by reward and punishment. Potentially, this means a game developed using Lobal's technology would have to be taught to a certain level before the game was finished, but then could continue to learn the individual patterns of play after the game had shipped, giving each player a unique gaming experience.

Of all the components making up a computer game, artificial intelligence (AI) is the least well understood – and the most controversial. Confusing matters is the fact that the definition of 'AI' varies radically between game genres. If Peter Molyneux can claim some intelligence for the creatures in *Black & White*, for instance, it's because many players already assume a level of anthropomorphism. In contrast, the AI in *Gran Turismo* is considered more linear. And whether it was true or not, few would believe a Kazunori Yamauchi boast that *GT*'s Skyline GT-R had a level of consciousness...

Professor **John Taylor** of King's College, London is looking to change all that with the help of his new AI startup Lobal Technologies. And it certainly comes packed with academic brains. Taylor himself is emeritus professor and director of the Centre for Neural Networks, and the president of the International Neural Network Society. Various members of his research centre at King's are also involved in the nascent company.

"Neural networks have now come of age, especially in terms of trying to model how the brain works," explains Professor Taylor. Previously, most AI systems, whether used for modelling the brain's functions or running bots in a firstperson shooter, have been strictly rule-based and thus unable to learn. The neural network view is more complex, being an attempt to actually model the physical structure of the human brain (ie the neuronal matrix) in either software or hardware.



Black & White's AI, while impressive, is still some way off from the autonomous systems Lobal is currently developing. These rely on models of how the brain works

"There are two levels of processing in the brain," continues Taylor. "Rule-based systems only deal with the top level. The way we're approaching it is to create the higher-level processing from the lower level. The only rules we put into the system are the initial architecture of the brain's neural systems, which are then used to generate the system's own rules for decision-making and planning."

Green and pleasant LAD

The company's first prototype LAD (see 'The learning process' box), currently has the vocabulary of a two-year-old. Taylor expects that as more of the brain's components are modelled and integrated into the system, LAD2, which is due to be commercially available in February 2003, will be able to recognise 1,000 words. This is equivalent to the average vocabulary of a six-year-old.

A more pertinent issue is why such a high-powered setup is targeting game developers. "Given the amount of processing power available on the new consoles and the upswing in the business cycle, we see a proliferation of the type of games that are going to be developed," explains **Brady Anderson**, Lobal's chief operating officer. "This in turn means that differentiation between titles will become key – it will no longer be down to the visuals, but the intelligence of gameplay."

But while it may be some time before Lobal's approach can deal with heavy-duty AI tasks, there are particular technical niches which will become more viable as a result of its research. One is voice-control of a game character. "This won't be for every game," admits Anderson, "but what we're suggesting is the ability to control multiple agents. You will control one with a controller as normal, but then be able to command others using a 1,000-word vocabulary via a voice recognition system." The uptake by female gamers – who generally prefer a more communicative game style than males – could be phenomenal. The sports sim could also benefit – in the form of unscripted play-by-play announcements, generated by the software's own AI routines. An intelligent Murray Walker or John Motson commentary? Now that would be progress...



The linear AI of titles such as *Creature Labs* would certainly benefit from the AI agents being developed by Lobal

www.gdconf.com

The way back to San Jose

March 19–23, San Jose, California... It's time for the world's game developers to start preparing for their annual soirée at GDC 2002







Maxis co-founder Will Wright (top) and Mr *Gran Turismo* Yamauchi-san (above) are just two of the impressive industry figures speaking at this year's event

Weird and wonderful

GDC always throws up some bizarre sessions during its run. Here are five of this year's strangest:

1. Using a Webcam as a Controller
Jonathan Blow, Bolt Action Software

2. More of the 400 Rules of Game Design
Noah Falstein, The Inspiracy, and Hal Barwood, LucasArts

3. Why We Shouldn't Make Games
Ernest Adams

4. Software Contracting as an Xtreme Sport
Jim Charne, Jim Charne Law

5. The Phenomenology of Game Design
Thomas Buscaglia, Ballroom Games



UK speakers at GDC 2002 include James Golding (left) and Matthew Southern

After an impressive performance by Microsoft's Xbox troopers last year, Sony will return in force to dominate the line-up for the 2002 Game Developers Conference. The company boasts three keynote speakers: Kazunori Yamauchi, creator of *Gran Turismo*, who will talk about advancing a franchise through design; Sony America's head of development, Shuhei Yoshida, who will outline tricky next console production issues; and, in what seems likely to be a well-attended session, Sony Japan's chief technology officer Shin'ichi Okamoto, who will detail his work heading up the company's broadband and business division.

Other keynote speakers include Valve's Gabe Newell, who is unlikely to be mentioning anything about *Half-Life 2* during his business & legal speech. Peter Chan, the conceptual artist for the 'Harry Potter' and 'Star Wars: Episode I' movies will also be discussing 'Crossing Over to Film and Back Again'. Following on from his memorable solo slot in 2001, the highlight of the entire event seems likely to be the much-anticipated collaboration between *The Sims* creator Will Wright and comic book genius Scott McCloud. Flagged as 'When Maps Collide: a conversation', it's sure to be standing room only.

Industry event

Held in the San Jose convention centre from March 19 to March 23, GDC is the annual conference for US developers, although there are plenty of European attendees, too. Over 300 lecturers and tutorials are packed into the five days, while on the expo floor, middleware companies unveil their latest tools.

More than 200 companies are displaying their wares this year, including Havok, MathEngine, LithTech, SN Systems and the usual array of 3D modelling tool vendors. Major product announcements are expected from Intrinsic Graphics, which will be demonstrating a new version of its 'Alchemy' game engine. Criterion Software is also rumoured to be showing a new piece of development code. Other highlights include the Game Developers Choice Awards, which is the closest the industry gets to the Oscars, and the Independent Games Festival, which gives unsigned teams the chance to impress the professionals with their work.

There will be two new events in 2002 as well. The Independent Game Developers Association holds its first academic summit, while the importance of wireless gaming, even during the industry's economic uncertainties, is underlined with the day-long Wireless Games Summit. UK speakers on the subject include Digital Bridge's Chris Wright, who talks about mainstream wireless gaming, and Kuju's Ian Baverstock, who has a more quizzically-titled talk: 'Mobile Phone Games: where are they now and where are they going?'

Other UK speakers at GDC include Andrew Hamilton and Dave Ranyard, giving a case-study on the user-interface for Sony's *This Is Football 2002*, while David Braben gives his views on future technology. **Edge** is also pleased to note input from previous Codeshop interviewees, with MathEngine's James Golding (**E**105) holding forth on the subject of level-of-detail, rigid-body physics, while Matthew Southern of the International Centre for Digital Content (**E**100) delves deep into a cultural study of games.

Tickets for GDC cost between $525 and $1,950, depending on the level of access required. Online registration closes on March 12.

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



Perfect your dating techniques at home with these (rather expensive) lifesize *Tokimeki Memorial* dolls







Bistro Cupid: quite literally the food of love. Microsoft's hoping Japanese gamers will play on





No plans as yet, though, for any lifesize dolls based on the title. More's the shame in **Edge**'s opinion

01 Lifesize love dolls

Japan: ¥450,000 (£2,400) might seem a bit much to pay, even for a lifesize replica of your favourite videogame character. But then it could be argued that the enormous popularity of the *Tokimeki Memorial* dating sim series has always defied logic. After all, the fundamental high-school dating mechanics haven't been tampered with since the earliest SNES versions of the game, yet the series has made its way onto just about every hardware platform up to the PlayStation2. And every version sells in huge quantities. In any case, for a fully poseable version of either Hikari Hinomoto or Kaori Yae, complete with 14 points of articulation, and winter and summer uniforms, £2,400 seems entirely worth it. **Edge** certainly wants to get hold of one (Hikari, preferably).

02 Can I have amour please?

Japan: In an apparent bid to target the otaku section of the Japanese gaming audience, Microsoft will be bringing out *Bistro Cupid*, a love cooking sim for the Xbox on March 7, soon after the console's launch. Although the erotic restaurant management genre has proved a staple part of the diet of Japanese PC gamers, it's still a bit of a surprise to see the title, which is being developed by Success, appear as a near-launch title for a new console. Nevertheless, such an accomplished combination of gourmet cuisine and formal erotica certainly adds some spice to the rich choice of gaming flavours offered on Xbox. **Edge** just can't decide whether the combination of food and love is a tastier prospect than that of the robot/dating sim combo offered by the *Sakura Taisen* series.

Soundbytes

"... this jam-packed sequel will make you crap your pants with glee."

'Electronic Gaming Monthly' gets coprophiliac on yo' ass in its review of *Super Smash Bros. Melee*

"One of the things that defines us as human beings is our ability to play. Through play we learn, create, socialise, and stimulate our imaginations. It is a positive and inclusive activity."

Bartle Bogle Hegarty boss, Harvey Eagle, attempts to put animal behaviourists to shame while talking about the European Xbox ad campaign

"Frequently, developers use our platforms solely for their own self-interests, so it's hard to form management relationships. Rather than business-to-business relationships, we've chosen more personal collaborations, such as creator-to-creator. Capcom's decision to release *Biohazard* on the GameCube is a direct result of that."

Satoru Iwata reveals Nintendo's thirdparty strategy while talking to CoreMagazine.com

"Do not buy a GeForce4-MX for *Doom*. GF4-MX will still run *Doom* properly, but it will be using the NV10 codepath with only two texture units and no vertex shaders."

John Carmack's .plan file presents a technical argument for more accurate naming conventions.

03 'Survive the Horror'

US: Thanks to a remarkably low-rent approach to marketing on the part of the film's producers, one lucky winner will shortly be treated to a complimentary screening of the *Resident Evil* movie for their friends, as well as $2,500 (£1,800) in cash. With the majority of the budget no doubt taken up by attracting big name stars like Milla Jovovich, it appears they ran out of money for a promotional poster. Seemingly unabashed, their solution was to simply hold a design competition. So it was that the best five entries were posted on the Internet for the public to judge, and a winner announced on January 25. The 'Resident Evil' movie will be released in the UK in June (to be confirmed).

04 'Robotech' in Game Boy guise

US: It's the animated series that kicked off the US craze for transformable mecha and Japanese animation. It's based on three separate Japanese series, combined under an originally conceived plot for US syndication. And though it's been a long time coming, fans of the 1985 Harmony Gold animated series 'Robotech' can finally jump into a bitmapped Veritech and take to the skies against the perfidious Zentraedi. Inarguably the greatest anime series ever (in **Edge**'s opinion), it is set to appear on GBA next year, courtesy of publisher TDK Mediactive. Featuring two and fourplayer link play, as well as characters such as Rick Hunter, Maximillian Sterling and Miryia, other next-gen versions are set to follow – whetting appetites in advance of that other high-profile childhood anime conversion, 'Battle of the Planets'.

05 Online mecha

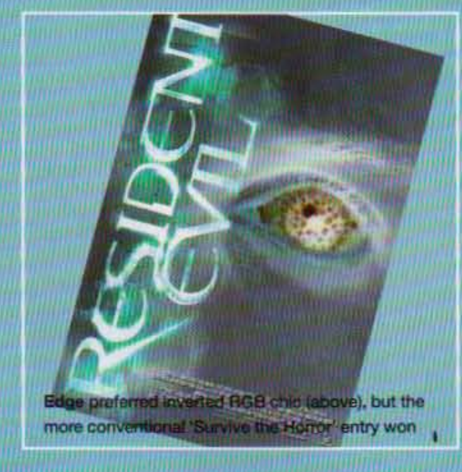
Japan: Despite the success of *Phantasy Star Online*, Japanese gamers continue to display an aversion to online gaming. But this could be about to change, thanks to the imminent release of Bandai's *Universal Century Gundam Online*. Initially set during the beginning of the monumental mech series that's been going since the end of the '70s, it enables players to create their own character and explore a massive gameworld, choosing from three categories of profession, and gaining experience to acquire new skills and new mechs. Plans are already in place to extend the universe to later periods in the saga – and to allow up to 160,000 players to take part at one time. Surely it still can't be as exciting as going on a Fear Raid though.

Data Stream

Number of EA *Harry Potter* games sold during the holiday season: **7m**
Percentage of males who voted for Aki Ross as the world's sexiest animated character in recent poll: **37**
Percentage of males who voted for Lara Croft as the world's sexiest animated character in same poll: **43**
Year-on-year fall in PC sales last year: **11%**
Number of computers sold by Compaq in last three months of 2001: **3.8m**
Number of computers sold by Compaq in last three months of 2000: **4.7m**
Number of Pokémon titles in ECCSELL's top ten ranking, based on sales figures: **3**

03

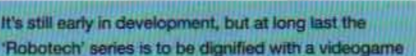




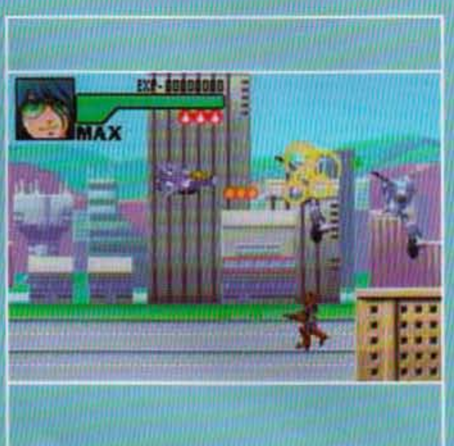
Edge preferred inverted RGB chic (above), but the more conventional 'Survive the Horror' entry won

04





It's still early in development, but at long last the 'Robotech' series is to be dignified with a videogame





05



It's not quite *Ultima Online*; you can't spend your time perfecting the art of baking bread, for example



But on the positive side, *Gundam Online* does feature a comprehensive selection of Big Robots









Edge shudders to think what mayhem might ensue if this technology falls into the wrong hands



See if you can beat Edge's high scores now that Atari *Asteroids* is heading to Game Boy Advance



Battlezone on GBA; does this mean that Nintendo's handheld is to become standard military issue?







A light in the dark: Joytech's illuminating £15 assault on Game Boy Advance Eye Strain

06 Big Robots get R/C

Japan: On the off chance that you've got £520 to spare (or, more precisely, ¥98,000) after shelling out for a Dreamcast, PS2, Xbox and GameCube, it's probably worth checking out the ultimate in Japanese future technology: radio-controlled *Gundam* robots from Bandai. It's little wonder that sales have already rocketed to 50,000 despite the prohibitive price; in addition to being able to control the robot's basic movement, there's also the small matter of a head-mounted camera that transmits to your controller, and a weapon that actually shoots BB pellets. For this reason alone, **Edge** dearly hopes that its somewhat rambunctious art editor won't ever be able to afford one.

07 Ain't no Atari like a Game Boy Atari

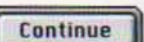
UK: Perhaps it was an oversight not to include it in the last issue of **Edge**, but Infogrames has announced a May release date for *Atari Anniversary Advance* on the Game Boy Advance. Released to commemorate Atari's 30th anniversary, it consists of six seminal titles from the Atari back catalogue: *Asteroids, Battlezone, Centipede, Missile Command, Super Breakout* and *Tempest*. It also features an exclusive Atari trivia game to test your classic arcade knowledge, although obviously anybody who got hold of a copy of **E**107 will have a slight advantage.

08 Illuminating old pro

UK: Twice now, the **Edge** office has been graced by the presence of Alex Verrey, aka Big Boy Barry of T.I.G.S fame. Always with a bright blue jacket and a huge box of delights, his visits are becoming legendary. Of course, his position as PR exec at peripheral company Joytech naturally raises suspicions that he's out to charm for column inches. The box is opened, the contents examined. A few thirdparty Xbox joypads – not bad. But lurking unassumingly to one side is a rare treasure: a GBA light-source that actually works. Due out in March, the Joytech Illuminator Pro retails at £15 and is a genuine ray of hope for handheld gamers. And as for the **Edge** quote you asked for, Alex – "It rocks!"

Continue

The new Eidos games label, Fresh Games
Any chance of PAL *Tokimeki Memorial* and *Sakura Taisen*?
Edge's 15 seconds of on-shelf TV fame
Thanks to a recent 'Daily Telegraph' ad campaign
The Edge Forum Meet
ROCK! \m/



Quit

***Final Fantasy* fanboys**
And, no, **Edge** doesn't have a 'bug up its ass'
Import gaming obstacles
Sony and Nintendo conspire to restrict our choice
Will from 'Pop Idol'
And his bizarre Egyptian-style posturing



09 Real-time 3D Character Animation

Just as there is a perceived divide between the arts and the sciences, so there is a divide in the world of game development between artists and programmers. It potentially catches Nik Lever's tome between a rock and a hard place. As expressed in the title, this book is aimed at a precise breed – would-be animators with a reasonable knowledge of Visual C++.

But for those who qualify, this book does contain a wealth of information. Using the OpenGL graphics application programming interface for PC, it takes you through the basics – starting with simple 3D geometry and the creation of low polygon characters – before tackling more advanced topics, such as setting up single-mesh character skeletons and texturing models. Other animation techniques, such as keyframe animation, are also covered. There's even a chapter on basic motion-capture techniques and making a simple mocap suit.

All this is supported with a tutorial CD which contains the full source code for the 'Toon3D Creator' development engine. This flexible tool enables programmers to create interactive demos and animations, with particular emphasis on compression techniques for Internet distribution. The resulting animations play within a Web browser using ActiveX controls. Unfortunately, it only supports 'LightWave' models, although other packages should be supported in future, and there is a chapter on importing geometry and animation from '3ds max'.

Packed with features, 'Real-time 3D Character' promises to help program-savvy designers hone their techniques still further.

10 Wanderers and Islanders

What is it about fantasy writers and their need to generate whole series of books? Cynics would say it's a lack of imagination that once they've created one world of characters, they have to get as much mileage out of it as possible. Conversely, audiences will always want to know more about a well-constructed universe. It's an approach that certainly worked for Tolkien. And at least with Steve Cockayne's debut novel, readers are in the right place – at the beginning. 'Wanderers and Islanders' marks the launch of his 'Legends of the Land' saga. And it's a promising start.

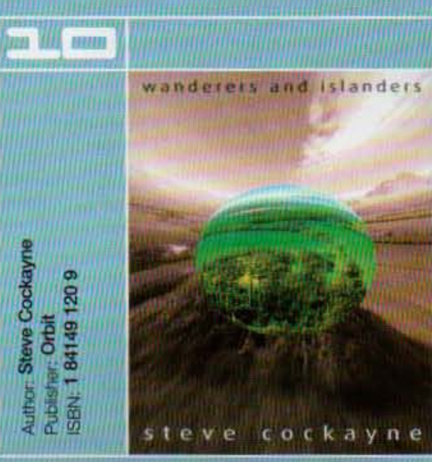
Set in a world that is part-1890s rural England, part-magical fantasy, it's an ensemble piece with the overarching story told through the exploits and dreamstates of various characters. A young boy receives a visionary gift he knows nothing of, an old man is haunted by a malevolent presence, while the King's magician is embittered as his techniques are overcome by progress of a different kind. It doesn't sound like much, but there is something compelling about the way Cockayne weaves these disparate components together to create a satisfying whole. Perhaps, more importantly for his future plans however, is the slow emergence of a world of opportunities. So even if he does rely on a certain amount of underhand smoke and mirrors to bring his first instalment to a conclusion, there's a good chance things will become clearer next time.

09



Author: Nik Lever
Publisher: Focal Press
ISBN: 0 240 51664 8

10



Author: Steve Cockayne
Publisher: Orbit
ISBN: 1 84149 120 9

11



Site: The Kanji Site
URL: www.kanjisite.com

11 Website of the month

It's often said that the only way to fully appreciate a foreign culture is by learning the language. There's a substantial amount of Japanese language-learning resources on the Internet, ranging from http://japanese.about.com/blbeginner.htm to Tad Perry's Quick And Dirty Guide To Japanese (which can be found in several different versions using a reliable search engine).

And given the impossibility of highlighting a single site that covers every conceivable aspect of grammar, syntax and etiquette, The Kanji Site is a lot of fun for the novice linguist. Just remember that you might need to download some add-ons to enable your browser to read kanji Websites. Nihongo o benkyou shimashou!

12 Advertainment

Japan: Another issue, another quirky Nintendo ad – any more and some might think **Edge** is biased. This month, what appears to be an omelette gets generously coated in ketchup. Then the fun begins.



Silly, repetitive song plays: "Tomatomatomatoma-to kechapuppu…"



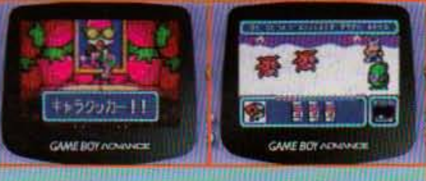
"… Toma-to toma-to toma-to ma-to, toma-to toma-to toma-to ma-to, toma-to toma-to toma-to ma-to."



One tomato rises above the rest. Voiceover: "Welcome to the Tomato Ketchup kingdom!"



"You know, there's always something going on in the kingdom of the tomato."



"New battles, new encounters, new enemies, new friends…"



"Things are always happening at any given moment."



"*Tomato Adventure* for Game Boy Advance." Trumpet plays. The end.

Play *Rez* for long enough and you'll start to believe that there is a God, and that he's looking after videogames. He's an unkind God, true: he doesn't care much for your eyes, and will melt them with lasers, see them drip from your sockets after only a few hours' play. And he doesn't care for your ears, either, because, played at the volume the game deserves, the soundtrack will have them streaming blood. He brutalises your senses to make you a better person, because there is no question that every moment of pain is enjoyable. This is videogame sadomasochistic pleasure on a grand scale, and that's before you even consider the giant rumble pack. Hurt me more, Sega. RedEye deserves it. Hurt me more.

God, what a lover, even though she broke your heart. The Dreamcast slipped away, and gaming mourned, but now there is *Rez*, *Monkey Ball*, *Phantasy Star Online Ver.2*, and the imminent glorious concept, and the enthusiasm continues as the idea sweeps the devco like a bushfire. It ends the second their idea is sold to a publisher, renamed, and turned into an extreme sportz platform game with collectible coins, fully destructible environments, and a major cartoon licence. Two years building a tiny part of something you don't care about. Two years.

And the industry continues to suck itself off around you. Read the press releases, the interviews, the near-eternal use of that bastard word 'product'. Hear the chorus of company fellows toeing the PR line? Lies, beautiful, all-knowing tech-stupid lies. See all those evangelic interviews in these pages? Faces, promises, smiles, all about to break. I really believe in this product. I really believe in this product. I really believe in this product. Say it enough times and someone might believe you, dev-boy. RedEye doesn't. Not any more.

dream... Bedroom coding is dead; battery farm coding, as exhibited in hundreds of placid-blue partition-walled halls in publisher-owned devcos across the country, is the only way of making product, and product is what the people want. No chance for haikus there. Only licences.

You want to talk about development hell? Take a tour round a codefarm. There are the programmers spewing out million-line databases of code to a half-assed brief: make it like *GoldenEye*, but with skateboards! Over there are the artists endlessly perfecting another concrete texture, then another, then another, then moving on to tweaking a soldier's grimace because the lead designer didn't think the last one was gritty enough. There are those designers watching their perfect design briefs change to the whims of marketing men and carefully measured demographics. And in the corner, the Marketing Men are burning in hell. Burning. In. Hell.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Travesty: media without passion

prospect of *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Virtua Fighter 4* – why is it so hard to like games these days without sounding like a Sega fanboy? Perhaps it's a fluke that it's on such a roll, or maybe it's borne out of circumstance, that Sega is a hired gun in the console war, scientists free to create. Oh, to have that freedom...

And to be so human as well. Unsubstantiated rumours of Mizuguchi's game-inspiring chemical recreation and the family-feel of UGA's homepage; Nagoshi's affecting and self-depreciating videogame diary; Naka-san's kid-in-toyshop self-contained hysteria at winning an **Edge** award for *PSO*; and so on. Perhaps because we see the photos of the divisional heads at key announcements, clubbed together like our fractured family, and we think that they actually care. Maybe they do. It's an ideal job, after all. Or maybe it's not; maybe they're just going to work, working to rule.

Guess what? Developers churn out shit to deadline, just like the rest of us. Let us talk of the apathetic majority: Oh, there will be a time when they are passionate and love their game, maybe. That time begins right by the office water machine at the very moment that you, the designer, suggest a

Listen: this is not the world you envisage it to be, of original *Defender* cabinets, of Scalextric and pristine freeplay pool tables and spur-of-the-moment office Nerf wars. This is not a house of creativity, one that allows pleasant binary doodling. This is a world where Revolution, a beautiful intelligent developer run by a talented, devoted man, ends up working for six months on *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? 2*. There are no stories to tell there. No art. No merit. The only thing it can say on its newsletter is that the Chris Tarrant character model runs at 6,000,000 polygons per second. Six million polys, and no room for a soul.

Imagine what that's like, to have your creativity ripped from underneath you. Places like Revolution, and its contemporaries – Mucky Foot, Warthog, and so on – they are all that remains of the indie dream, the idea that creativity within videogaming can exist and be a commercially viable proposition. But when one of them falls, then we're another step closer to Activision, Infogrames, THQ's

How fun is that? It doesn't matter, because this is no longer a dream job. This is not about games. This is about work, and cheerful little J Allard is not skating down the corridor. Not today, not ever.

Maybe that's why RedEye loves Sega so much. Because, even though it's probably an illusion, *Rez*-led laser-lightshows and smoke and mirrors, it seems like the company cares – like it's doing this for the art, for love, for your love, for our love. RedEye doesn't do too much to find out the truth: it's almost certainly an illusion, but it's an illusion RedEye's happy to keep believing in, because hope is so important and there's so little hope around. What does RedEye know, anyway? He's writing blind, writing to deadline, senses blown by one of Sega's creations. God or no God, it's difficult to believe something so heavenly could have been made by people working to rule.

Bedroom coding is dead; battery farm coding is the only way of making product, and product is what the people want

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Videogames and politics do not at first glance have much to do with each other. Games, after all, are about the creative joy of exploration, speed or destruction. It's one thing to analyse *Pac-Man* as a neo-Marxist parable of late 20th century capitalism – an argument that works not by attempting to reconstruct the supposed intentions of the work's creator, but by reading the game in its historical and cultural context – but to suggest that many videogames have certain political themes, and political standpoints, built in to them is another matter entirely.

Well, it's a rare cultural artefact that is not informed, willingly or not, by the political context in which it was created. Take *The Sims*, for example. Rapidly becoming an extraordinarily successful multi-tentacled franchise, it is the soap-opera version of Pokémon, and a thoroughly shameless advert for the American way. Buy a Sim a large mirror and she will be happier, by virtue of being able to gaze at her reflection. Buy him a new oven, and he'll become more popular after giving dinner parties. Help your Sim climb the slippery pole of a career as a politician or scientist. This is a game in which the brutal rules of free-market capitalism are everything. More money makes a Sim happier; social dissidents are not allowed. You want to drop out of the rat race, wear charity shop tweed suits and spend your days playing chess in the park? Sorry. Such gameplay possibilities are ruled out by the political assumptions buried deep in the game's structure.

Will Wright's earlier opus, *SimCity*, had a pre-coded bias towards efficient public transport systems. You couldn't build a city that looked like Los Angeles or London because it would grind to a halt. Furthermore, as an American scholar of urban planning pointed out, the game's structure implies that mayors are useless figureheads and that considerations of race are irrelevant to designing cities. It has taken until the recent third iteration of the *Civilization* series, meanwhile, to acknowledge that literature, music and other forms of culture play a role in the development of society.

It was inevitable, in fact, that as soon as videogames began attempting to simulate social realities, no matter how sketchily, they were going to have to make political choices and build their worlds on those opinionated foundations. *Pac-Man*'s abstract, symbolic nature means it can function as an allegory while remaining afloat and untethered above the universe of ordinary worries. But the greater complexity and iconicism of modern games means that nearly every reference to real world social structures has a particular political valency.

One alarming recent example is *Dropship*. Among the targets of the player's campaigns are, first, an Osama Bin-Laden-type terrorist leader, with desert training camps that must be wiped out, and then a Colombian drug dealer, whose facilities are similarly to be eliminated. While the first might seem slightly tasteless in the light of the war in Afghanistan, it is the second that appears really damagingly questionable. A simple arithmetic of shoot and destroy serves only to bolster the assumption that a 'war on drugs' makes any social sense in the first place. The fact that such vastly expensive military action is likely only to drive the street price of drugs up, rather than eliminating the proven demand, and so simply cause more drug-related theft and other crime in the free cities served by the game's fictional 'United Peace Force', is wholly foreign to the game's moral universe. It's a shooting game; we need targets. Any old target will do.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Politics: videogames with a message

As soon as videogames began attempting to simulate social realities, they were going to have to make political choices

The problem of choosing an enemy is one shared, of course, with American films. Once the Cold War ended, Hollywood went on an arbitrary shopping spree for villains of the right ethnicity. They tried renegade ex-Soviets, insane Australian media magnates, deceitful Chinese, even Frenchmen. These days, though, you can't go wrong with someone of vaguely Arabic origin. Symbolising as he does to Hollywood the twin evils of the Gulf War and of religious fundamentalism – please try not to mention the fact that America itself is probably the largest hotbed of religious zealotry on the planet – the Arab-stroke-Muslim looks like being the bogeyman of choice for the foreseeable future. *Dropship*'s featured terrorist leader, in a piece of trivial misdirection, glories in the very un-Muslim name Marco Ramm, but the player might well wonder what he is doing operating from bases in Libya. *Dropship*'s vaguely imagined 'near future' is an incoherent mess.

Now, such objections to videogame politics look as though they might require a critic also to admit that people who play shoot 'em ups will inevitably buy a gun and murder all their schoolfriends. After all, how can subtle political themes be influential while balls-out ultraviolence isn't? Well, there is a difference. *Grand Theft Auto III*'s unapologetic moral nihilism, set in a reasonably naturalistic realm, points up the clear distinction between our virtual actions and the political assumptions that enable them. Just as the soldier does not choose his orders, but does his best in the context of a mission designed by generals safe at their desks, so the gameplayer has no choice but to indulge in the kind of behaviour that the game system is designed to encourage. Even if we wanted to live a law-abiding life in Liberty City, we couldn't. Similarly, we follow orders in *Dropship* and unleash missiles in the Colombian drug baron's territory. Fine; but it's the idiots in Washington who make the policy that we should be worrying about.

Arguably the politics buried at a game's base are more likely to have an undesirable effect on the worldview of suggestible consumers such as children precisely because they are so well hidden. Certainly if, as many scholars are beginning to argue, videogames have educational potential – witness the common use of *SimCity* in American high schools (with wise caveats, one hopes, from the teachers) – then it must be conceded that they also have the potential to educate people in the wrong way.

As gameplayers, we can leave such questions to the social scientists. For us, the question can be rephrased in aesthetic terms. Certainly a game can be enjoyable while being stupid on the political level. But we should aspire higher. Don't we want our games to be more intelligent, as well as more fun?

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

Movies. I love them. This month, I write about the movies I noticed on Disney's home page. I used to study movies in university, which probably explains why I love them so much. Anyway, a lot of times I buy a video or DVD of a movie I'm interested in, so now I have quite a collection at home. And then I began to say to myself: "Well, the way I enjoy movies at home is similar to the way I relate to the games I create."

Think about it. In movies, you have a theme, or a message: 'War,' 'Family Relationships,' etc... But, you may be touched or surprised by other elements, too. We have all experienced something like this before, right? This proves that sometimes elements different from the movie message or theme have a greater impact on you. Of course, the special thing I take away from any great movie is its story, and particular parts or sequences of that story, those that had a big effect on me in the cinema. It's because I love these bits so much that I want to experience them over and over, and watch the movie again at home on video.

Take 'Apollo 13', for example. That's a film I really love. The movie's theme is "the greatness of the pioneering spirit with the support of love." Personally, though, I see in 'Apollo 13' "the confidence in another person, plus the importance and greatness of the teamwork." In my work, for instance, when things don't go the way I'd like them to, when the project is not running smoothly, I watch this movie. I want to be like Ed Harris as NASA's team leader...

After watching 'Apollo 13', I'm full of energy again. In my case, then, I watch this movie when I need to find courage in some challenging situations.

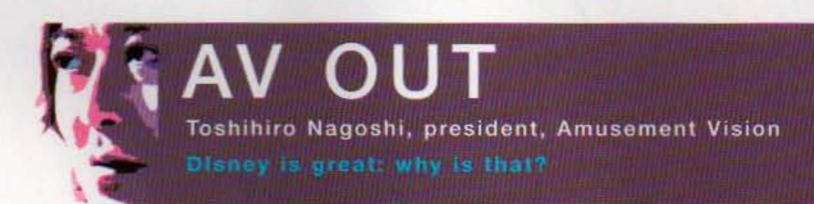
So what has all this to do with Disney, you might ask? Well, I see that passion I have for movies, and the effect they have on people's lives, in each Disney creation. For them, there is a passion in making the movie and in the creators' love for their project. The focus of Disney's market is children, true, but it has this power to touch adults as well. It sounds such a simple thing to do, but, believe me, it is a very difficult thing to do. Of course, the skill and the technology behind Disney's creations is very high, and admired across the world. The designers' *vision* is also very deep. Watching a Disney movie, I can almost feel the artist's struggles and desires, why they wanted to do the movie in this way... You don't need to ask them; you can feel it in the work up onscreen. You understand that their love for the artform is focused – and that feeling is passed on to their audience. After all, a movie is made to induce this emotion, isn't it? But Disney does it in a most beautiful way, and in such a quick and interesting way, too. It may sound like flattery, but that is how I feel.

So when I watch a Disney movie at home, I say many things to myself: "Is my work right?", "Do I still make it with all the quality required?" or "Do I still have the passion?" From 'Toy Story' to the most recent productions, I hear some people say that Disney has become all about CG, but I think the truth is quite different. I don't think this is the way chosen by the company. Of course, when you look at the amazing movies created by Pixar, you should be amazed by their skills, but in doing this we should also not forget about the love that went into their many successful projects too. I watched 'Toy Story' at least 100 times, possibly more, when I first bought it. No, really! It was as if I was addicted to it. The best sequence of the entire movie, the one when Buzz Lightyear is lighting the firework on his back to take off and save his friend Woody, makes me cry like a waterfall every time.

But it's great to feel this way, to get so involved in a project you feel passionate about. I long for the day I could work like the people at Pixar and Disney, and create what they have created. To be able to pass on such emotion through the content of your work is an amazing skill. It's quite an issue for me.

I get the same feeling of passion from Nintendo, a company I like very much. In this way, it's similar to Disney. Not just because the company focuses mainly on the kids market, but because I can see the same passion coming from its creative people. Even in the games industry, it's love and passion that drives the best creators. It's not the technology on its own. Humans will remain human beings, with the same passions, long into the future, despite technological progress. I believe that Disney and Nintendo are showing us the way forward in this respect. Now I must get back to work and use those same principles there. But first I need to go back home to see Buzz setting out to rescue his friend again. And maybe I'll have a good cry, too.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Disney is great: why is that?

I long for the day I could work like the people at Pixar and Disney... to be able to pass on such emotion through my work

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

TOKYO GAME LIFE





Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, Game Wave DVD

In the first of a series of columns, Kojima-san fights his way out of 2001

My name is Lupin Kojima. It's my pen name and the real one is Kojima Hajime. I salute all of you from Tokyo, the capital of the videogame empire. I work on a magazine called 'Game Wave DVD' (published by the Enterbrain group), which is based on a DVD in the form of video content. I used to work on the 'Weekly Famitsu' magazine, where we thought the paper medium wasn't perfectly adapted to deal with a media like videogames, so we decided to start a video-based magazine: DVD looked like the perfect candidate.

So we launched this new magazine in Japan. I have to admit that it's a great experience, something totally new and quite exciting. We can deliver incredible video to make our readers experience all the intensity of an action game, a full lap of a racing game or even a complete series of combos in a fighting game. I really would like to show all the readers of **Edge** our work.

No matter how great the graphics are, no matter how far the technology is advanced, a game remains a game: only gameplay matters. When you clear it and have reviewed all the secrets, you stop: it is time to go on. Next. Like movies, when you see the ending of a RPG or a simulation game, your interest for the game fades.

The same applies to fighting games. You train and play with a friend of a similar level, if possible. This is fun. You win or lose. The tension rises and the all thing ends in a great ambiance. When a stronger opponent arrives, he is going to deploy his mighty techniques against you, defeating you using determinate, boring tactics: you stop to play. A game is something, which entertains you when you have some free time. So when I'm not busy, I play.

That's all. Well this is how I enjoy videogames. I guess it was different when I was a child but as you become an adult, you start to think like that. I feel

This all combined to make me win. The number of victories and defeats remains clearly on my card. It is something real. My fighting history and my score remains as data. That looks similar to something familiar... The course of action I chose, my feelings, my motivation, well, the results... all these elements are real. Don't you think? So, yes, I'm experiencing *VF4* in a real world.

My objective is not to become the best in a fictive game environment, but truly in the real world. Some people may still look at *VF4* as a simple way to get entertained, as I used to do. Maybe they don't play a lot or they don't have any particular interest in it. But for me, this experience is completely different to previous ones. Until now I've been fighting against virtual adversaries. Suddenly, I'm facing real opponents with their own history. The reality is here, in front of me. The fun or the bitterness, many feelings are attached to this new experience.

Now, let's talk about our subject: Tokyo Game Life. Well it's quite a title but this is in fact a personal diary. My experiences of the videogames I have played recently. I hope this is okay with you. Well, I hoped it would be... yes?

In December 2001, in one of Shibuya's game centres in Tokyo, there is one game that I'm completely focused on (like other people): *Virtua Fighter 4*. In this game, you feel the long process invested, the long hours of thinking. It really delivers a unique experience, a great content, which gives the genre some new sensations.

The character access card is an important element of this masterpiece. You put it inside a reader integrated to the cabinet, the information is then read and displayed: ring name, score, national ranking, etc. While you play, you can save all this information on the card. If you access Sega's VF Net via the Internet or your cell phone you can see your data any time. But, why is this system so great? It reminds of the time before *VF4* was released.

that I'm more rapidly bored with videogames now. I mean the time you spend on a videogame until you are bored, well this time gets shorter as you grow up. My passion is still present, intact, but it gets high as fast as it is cooling down. Well, it is just a game after all, no? This is an artificial world, which as been built, not real. Okay, let's get back to the *VF4* card now. Here is the reason why it is so great.

In Virtua Fighter 4, you feel the long process invested, the long hours of thinking. It really delivers a unique experience

Thanks to this card, my opinion of the game has changed completely. Since I started to play *VF4*, using this card to save my personal data, I don't feel that I'm bored by the game as fast as before. I don't even think that a game is just something to entertain you when you have some free time anymore. I have discovered a new way to enjoy the game. I started training myself, learning new techniques and even searching for patterns in my adversaries.

The character, which is moving and fighting inside the screen, obeying the buttons and the lever I move, appears real as well.

In Japan, in the city named Tokyo, I work, I love, I cry, I smile... well, I live... no, I fight. In my life, my reality, *VF4* arrived. The character I always use, Sarah Briant, speaks to me. She asks me who I'm fighting against. Myself?

Thinking about this, I place in my mouth the cigarette I put on the ashtray of the cabinet. Leaving the game centre behind me – it is freezing outside – closing the zip of my jacket, I look at the sky, wondering. The moon looks big tonight. I decide to walk, back home. December, Tokyo Game Life.

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio

Edge's most wanted

Sakura Taisen

Big robots and girls might not be the only criteria for a good game, but in **Edge**'s opinion they're certainly the most important. Let's have a PAL version, please.



(PlayStation2) Sega

Rune

Snap has come on a long way. With majestic monsters and a card collection element, *Rune* promises to summon up a furiously addictive title.



(GameCube) Agetec

Tokimeki Memorial 3

The most recent edition of the unbelievably popular dating sim, **Edge** would appreciate a chance to sample the next-gen charms of next-gen ladies.



(PlayStation2) Konami

Animal Forest Plus

A hypercute version of *Little Computer People*, with free NES games and a constantly evolving world? Perfect for digital pet lovers sick of their *Seaman*.



(GameCube) Nintendo

GameCube Chastity Belt

Nintendo prescreens to take place under lock and key

The recently announced details of GameCube's European launch can only be good news. Though the final price point of the unit has been thrown into doubt by sections of the retail industry contesting Nintendo's recommended profit margins, news that the console is to feature 60Hz and RGB modes and will be accompanied by a healthy amount of software is welcome. It demonstrates a clear willingness to take the PAL market seriously, and the needs of PAL gamers seriously. But now that the announcement has been made, it's time for the rumour and speculation to start.

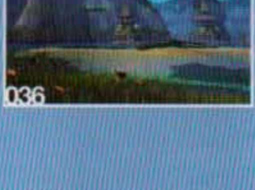
One of the more bizarre rumours to reach **Edge**'s ears regards the way in which previews of GameCube games are to be conducted. Instead of distributing debug versions of the console to videogame magazines in the usual manner (to enable prerelease software to be played), this rumour contends that Nintendo will make the process considerably more difficult. Apparently, prerelease software is instead to be bolted into a debug GameCube. It is then to be sent out, accompanied by a security guard, for journalists to play under his vigilant gaze, before being returned to the developer. All, presumably at the cost of the game's publisher.

Now this is a pretty extreme rumour. Unbelievable almost, were it not for the fact that Nintendo has always been reluctant to relinquish control over the flow of information regarding its forthcoming releases. But if the company is to really deliver on its launch promises, then it's going to have to communicate better with its customers. Both Sony and Microsoft seem to realise this, each taking considerable effort to make sure that the game-buying public understands what to expect from their respective consoles. They make sure that their games are given prominence on store shelves and demo pods by wooing the retail sector, and they make it relatively easy for the videogame press to get hold of prerelease software to preview and review forthcoming releases.

If Nintendo doesn't effectively convey the reasons for consumers to buy a GameCube, then it can't reasonably expect them to go out and do so. The best reason to buy a GameCube is the quality of the console's software. The best way to communicate this is through dedicated videogame magazines, and in-store demonstrations. Nintendo hardware has always played host to some of the most sophisticated and enjoyable videogaming experiences. Why then, does the company seems so reluctant to let people know?











Vexx



It's yet another 3D platformer with cartoon graphics, but Vexx's magnificent world promises to deliver a fairground full of dynamic rides and distractions

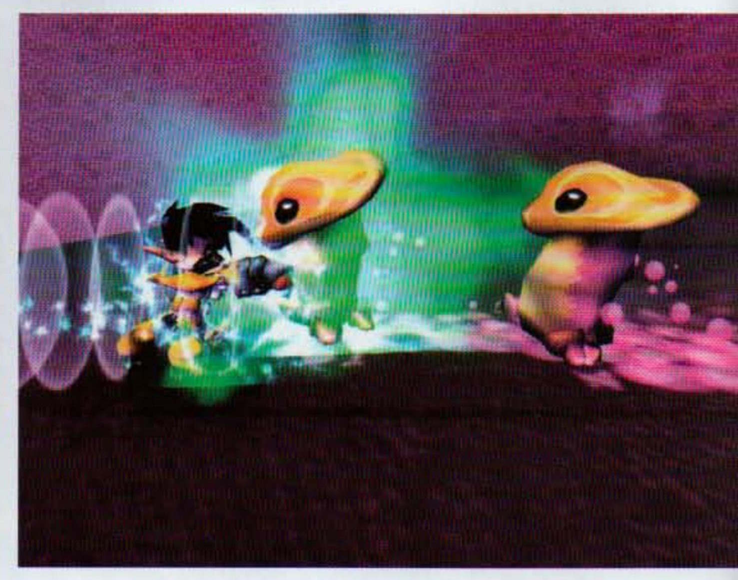




cclaim's fortunes always seems to rise with a new generation of hardware. The original *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* on N64 bolstered its brand but apart from one or two enjoyable titles th company's star has dimmed of late. Howev its main development teams in Austin, Texa have been busily fashioning two potentially impressive titles to push all three hardware formats. An expensive press event and a massive worldwide marketing spend for bot *Turok Evolution* (**E**107) and *Vexx* states the company's intention clearly: it wants to be a major player during the next-generation publishing and console war.

Both *Vexx* and *Turok Evolution* are being developed simultaneously for all three major formats, and ambitiously, Acclaim want a simultaneous release on all. Significantly, bo games have been demoed on Xbox hardwa only, with *Vexx* showing the most polish, at least visually. Although the money men are r doubt rubbing their hands at the prospect o increased profits from a cross-platform strategy, it remains to be seen whether *Vexx* will be as graphically resplendent on GameCube and, more obviously, PlayStation2. Certainly, one member of the development team expressed doubts to **Edge** that the textures would be quite so ric on Sony's hardware and mentioned that the would be 'some' loading in between section of the game.





Among the weird and wonderful creatures in the *Vexx* world are those which transform as day turns to night. Certain areas of the world won't be accessible unless you approach at a sociable hour

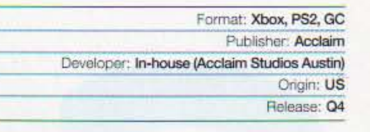






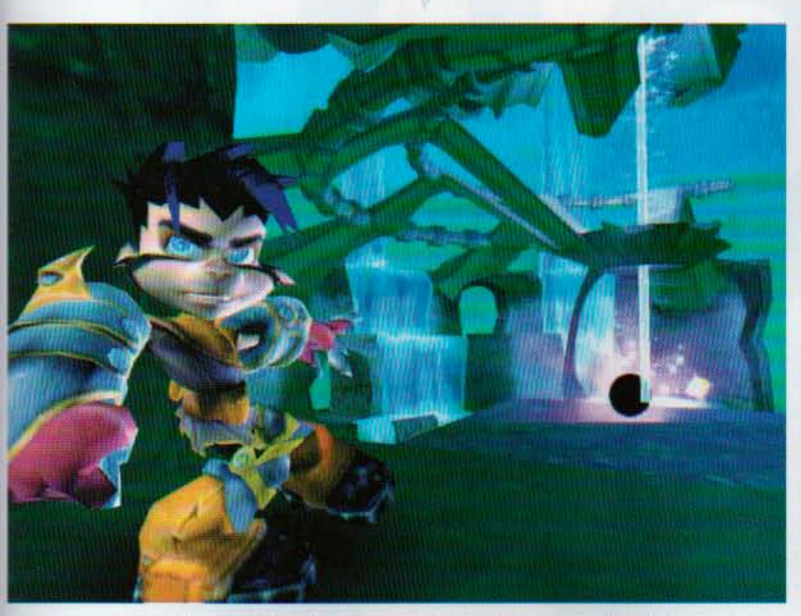
Head of games

The development team promises to deliver a *Super Mario 64*-style playground for players. Within every location there are a number of mini-games to break up the exploration and wandering. Indeed, many of the games do not have to be completed to finish the quest. Enter the eye of a monument and you might even be catapulted into a minecart racing event. Once unlocked they can be accessed from the main menu.



Format: **Xbox, PS2, GC**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **In-house (Acclaim Studios Austin)**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**





Comparisons with Naughty Dog's *Jak and Daxter* are difficult to avoid. The game also includes a more freeform structure than most 32bit platformers – something which has become very fashionable recently



Taking some inspiration from Nintendo's *Zelda* titles, *Vexx* is granted extra abilities once he collects the Astari War Talons. Climbing and swimming are two of the skills he can use to reach new locations

But to the game itself. Imagine the horror. Imagine the sinking feeling when an original idea you have lovingly designed from the ground up turns out to be *Jak and Daxter*. Okay, there's still some way to go for *Vexx* but the similarities are unmistakeable. In both look and feel the games almost seem as if they have been co-developed, but this couldn't be further from the truth. The Americanisation of the Japanese super deformed look is there (and like the characterisation in *Jak and Daxter*, it's cute but not in the same league as, say, *Freak Out*) and in terms of structure Acclaim Studios has also gone for a non-linear approach to the platforming antics.

Plot details are still unforthcoming – it's a continuing trend among developers to keep their precious stories a secret until final release – but there are orbs to collect from each area which aids the hero in his quest to find the Astari War Talons. In keeping with tradition, the acquisition of such power-ups allows Vexx to eventually glide, swim and climb, thus opening up fresh avenues of exploration. The current trend for non-linear platform exploration is certainly welcome and current evidence suggests that Acclaim's attempt is not mere window dressing. Draw distance is magnificent with some breathtaking vistas assailing the eyes from the highest pinnacles on the map. Indeed, part of the game's unique appeal, even more so than *Jak and Daxter*, is the mere act of traversing the landscape just to reach higher ground to see what the world has to offer.

Though a certain amount of freedom is offered, the game world is curtailed in key ways. A night and day element mutates the creatures and landscapes barring certain paths, while abilities must be acquired to get to the more dangerous locations. But there will always be several tasks the player can tackle to give the impression of freedom. (Though, thankfully, the designers are acutely aware of giving the player clear signposts to eradicate mindless wandering.)

Six beautifully realised landscapes encompass *Vexx*'s world and the developer promises that no invisible walls will plague the player. Transitions from one area to another can be achieved through simple exploration or from entering warp holes which transport Vexx either to a new location or into mini-games. Although not on display, the 'dynamic portal generation' effectively pulls Vexx into the landscape and spits him out into a new location using 'mind-blowing' technology. **Edge** looks forward to seeing the final effect.

While *Vexx* is one the most promising platform games to emerge for some time there are still many missing features. Although 24 objectives over 18 levels are promised, the overall structure remains unclear. Combat, too, is to play a large part in the game but

"Part of the game's unique appeal is the mere act of reaching higher ground just to see what the world has to offer"

was completely missing from the demo **Edge** witnessed. Simple combos and power-ups are expected, but the creatures of the world were equally conspicuous by their absence.

In terms of control and execution, moving Vexx around the game world with the Xbox analogue sticks is a suitably tactile experience. Timing and accuracy of the jumps has been implemented well, but camera niggles still need to be addressed (a feature which most developers seem to tweak at the last minute – or not, in some cases). Visually resplendent and full of good ideas, *Vexx* will hopefully out-*Daxter* Naughty Dog's recent PS2 effort.



Combat is a significant factor in the game but, worryingly, it is absent from the present code

Ryzom

Nevrax, a collective of French videogame veterans, is looking to make a break from anonymity with this highly ambitious MMORPG





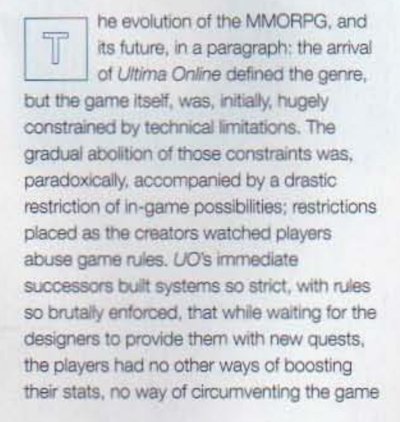


If the visuals seem lifeless or static, it's because for the moment the team have been concentrating on the technical aspects of the world. There's plenty of work to do before it hits beta stage



Nevrax hopes to place the emphasis firmly on teamwork, much like in *Phantasy Star Online*. And, just like *PSO*, players are expected to turn against each other in the heat of the moment, or just run away, scared





The evolution of the MMORPG, and its future, in a paragraph: the arrival of *Ultima Online* defined the genre, but the game itself, was, initially, hugely constrained by technical limitations. The gradual abolition of those constraints was, paradoxically, accompanied by a drastic restriction of in-game possibilities; restrictions placed as the creators watched players abuse game rules. *UO*'s immediate successors built systems so strict, with rules so brutally enforced, that while waiting for the designers to provide them with new quests, the players had no other ways of boosting their stats, no way of circumventing the game rules, no chance to scheme. In short, how do you satisfy the hardcore gamers?

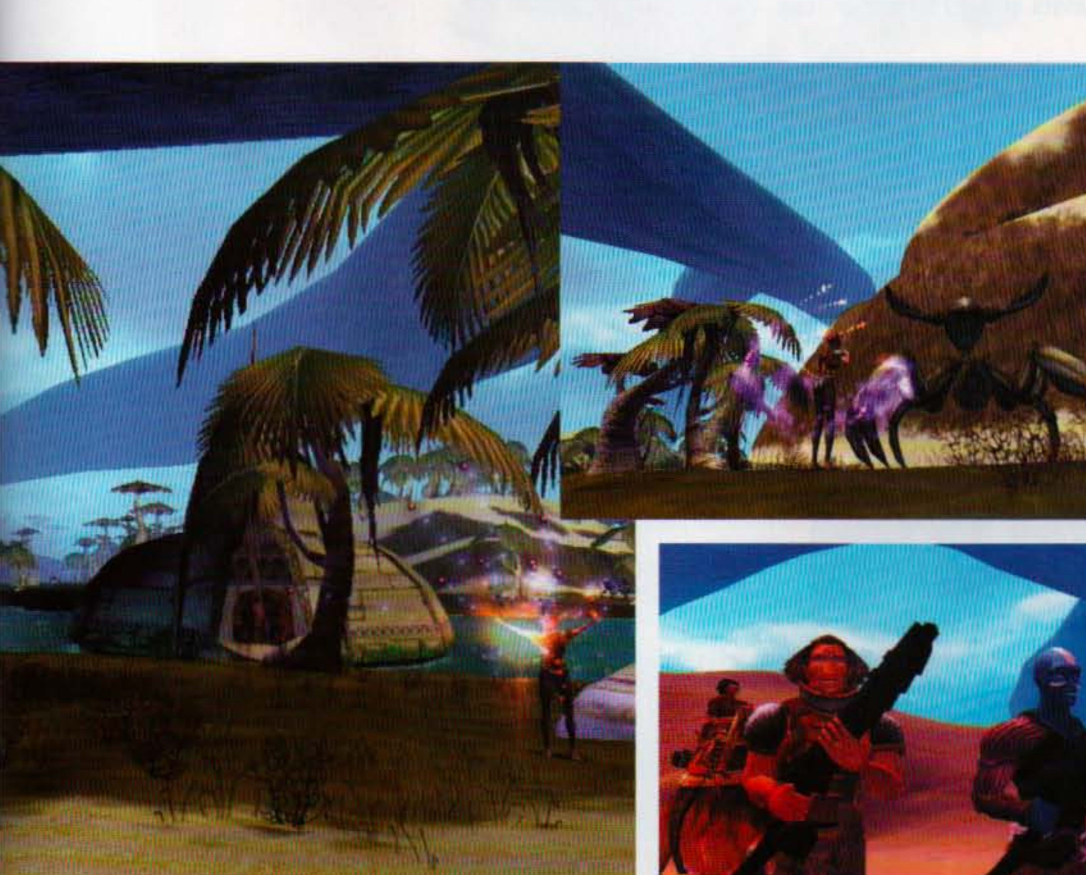
By developing black magic, you'll generate negative energy, making animals wilder and creating a more hostile world

While current MMORPGs work on cautiously reopening possible actions to players, *Ryzom* is based on the opposite principle: planet first, content second, do as thou wilt forever. The idea arose from a meeting, a few years ago, between game designer Philippe Nouhra, and Frederic Weil, creator of pen and paper RPGs, and founder of publisher Multisim. The two set about working on a believable game world, writing the history and the systems under which it would operate. That world became *Ryzom*, a lush, fertile world in a perennial state of imbalance – perfect to offer a wide range of possibilities to gamers, but an expensive proposition. Contrary to what might be presumed, the large number of French publishers doesn't constitute an advantage for their compatriot developers, and the project only emerged from embryonic stage when *Ryzom*'s creators met the head of Nevrax two years ago.

Assembled exclusively on private financing, Nevrax was a dream come true for Weil and Nouhra: investors were enthusiastic, and the team was assembled quickly, made up primarily of those disillusioned at other French devcos (Cryo, Kalisto, and so on), delighted by the chance to participate in an ambitious project which, for once, seemed to have a chance of success. The game's appeal rests on its system of player interdependence, free of any pre-established scenarios, and the 'one life to live' simulation feel – the idea is that permanent death obliges players to care about the consequences of their actions. It's an approach that's resolutely different from everything seen elsewhere, a system allowing everyone to find their place. Hardcore gamers are able to take into their hands the destiny of one of the game's four races, and, essentially, the planet's delicate equilibrium, while newcomers can assume less complex roles, albeit ones equally vital to the survival of civilisation.

In *Ryzom*, seeds act as currency, and money is perishable. Players find their first fistfuls of cash strewn outside the cities, within the less dangerous areas (though which still include places of interest to rid of enemies). More seeds are attainable through traders, or by whoring your services to the highest bidder, either for public or private missions. Money can be exchanged for knowledge, and knowledge is power, allowing you to accept harder missions worth more money. Guilds, as ever, prove crucial in forming bonds between players and enabling teamwork. They also create easy rivalries; war can be declared between guilds, allowing player-killing

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Nevrax**
Origin: **France**
Release: **2003**







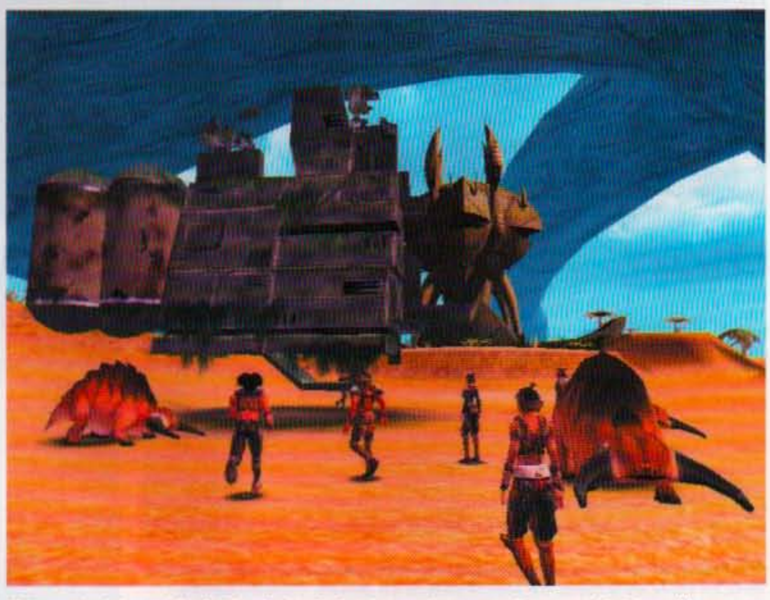


While character death is permanent, it doesn't necessarily mean game over. Since your character ages, it's necessary to train heirs (perhaps with skillsets different to your own) which are managed by AI until you assume control, either momentarily or permanently in the event of your main character's death.

Character development proceeds along two axes: technology and magic. The first allows control of techniques which, as well as helping in combat, allows creation of a broad range of spectacular objects – weapons and armour, amongst other things – at least for those with high skill levels and competence. These can be used, or traded for seeds at a price fixed by the player (although a price guide is available). Eventually, objects wear out, according to usage and time, and need to be replaced. Tech-heads make more, the magically competent buy them, and the market cycle continues.

Magic is based around *Ryzom*'s Gods, organic entities associated with a family of magic. Players must choose which one to devote themselves to, and by choosing one type of magic rather than another, begin to unbalance the world. For example, by developing black magic, you'll generate negative energy, making nearby animals wilder and creating a more hostile world. But it's not just you playing, and communities are forced to deal with the effects of their choices together.

And it's this tension – the stress on communities solving problems created by themselves – that marks *Ryzom* as having extraordinary potential. But Nevrax is still looking for a publisher, and the expense of managing an MMORPG, combined with the cautious manner with which innovation is treated within the industry, certainly won't work in its favour. **Edge** hopes the developer finds a trusting publisher; if it does, *Ryzom* could prove to be an exceptionally compelling experience.



While much of the world is fertile, allowing for luscious environments, *Ryzom* wouldn't be a videogame RPG without a desert 'scape. Will its sandpit compete with *Star Wars Galaxies*' Tatooine, though?



Format: Xbo
Publisher: Microso
Developer: Digital Illusion
Origin: Swede
Release: March 1

RalliSport Challenge

50, flat left, easy plus, tightens... Forget all that. The Xbox's first rally title opts for the straightforward approach – purists should turn over now



Brought to you by the people responsible for decent PC title *Rally Masters*, *RalliSport Challenge* represents Microsoft's opportunity to corner the market before genre leader Codemasters turns up with its third *McRae* offering.

It's likely to succeed, too – although, to be fair, not necessarily because *Challenge* promises to offer the ultimate in polygonal rallying. Like Digital Illusions' last foray into the digital motorsport world, *RSC* seems adequate rather than inspired. The handling caters for the casual, not the demanding, racing fan – a conscious move, perhaps, to maintain a safe distance from the simulation end of the spectrum, where any such tinkering would fall foul of purists. It's a little floaty and woolly, not unlike *Sega Rally 2* on the Dreamcast – and things have certainly moved on significantly since then. Don't misunderstand; this is far from disastrous,



You start with eight, but a further 21 cars – WRC, rallycross/Group B legends and hillclimb specials – unlock as you make your way through the game

but a little more elaboration in the handling mechanics would definitely help increase player involvement (particularly given that, in chase cam mode, cars fail to react convincingly to the road beneath their wheels and look overly static). Still, its straightforward and fun pick-up-and-play nature should please many.

By far the most appealing aspect of the game is its broad range of race categories, comprising a structured mix of hillclimb, ice racing, rallycross and normal rally stages (with the appropriate machinery for each class, naturally). While play modes are less ambitious, resorting to typical race game inclusions, at least the point system used for player progression offers some novelty, with scores dependent on elements such as average speed, race position and damage incurred (predictably, elaborate bodywork deformation can occur, although collisions currently feel a little rigid).

Plenty of opportunity for window smashing does occur during rallycross and ice racing meetings (you can also add competitors to the normally lonely world of hillclimb and rallying), but on current CPU mentality social types looking for exciting racing may wish to opt for fourplayer splitscreen instead (no Xbox link option is offered).

To end on a high, however, the sound (which also comes in Dolby Digital 5.1) has been recorded from the appropriate sources and is extremely impressive; it's one of the few such games that truly captures the ferocity of a rally-tuned engine. And while a little more detail wouldn't harm the vehicles, there's plenty to take your eyes off the road – draw distance is, as you'd expect, good, with tree and grass models swaying smoothly in the wind (or when hit).

Expect a review next issue.







Effects such as lighting and bump-mapping are notable, particularly on the ice circuits. While the tracks are fictitious, the livery of most cars is genuine. Trackside scenery, other than vegetation, is largely uninspired – although the odd spectator, cow or sheep does pop up. And, no, you can't run them over (you're not really allowed off track)

Praetorians

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Pyro Studios**
Origin: **Spain**
Release: **November**

After the critical and sales success of Commandos 2, Spain's premier development team looks east across the Mediterranean for its next inspiration

Post-'Gladiator', the only thing surprising about titles featuring the Republic or Empire of Rome is that there's so few of them. A period rich in both grime and decadence, resplendent with often brutal and expansive violence, the potential for possible game scenarios astounds. And, no, *Soul Calibur* doesn't really count.

It turns out *Praetorians* was already in development long before sandal-decked epics became fashionable, but only now is it reaching a fit enough state to be unveiled. With the enigmatic cartoon role-playing game *Heart of Stone* still firmly under wraps, it's down to Eidos' Roman-centric game to provide clues as to what the company's next move might be.

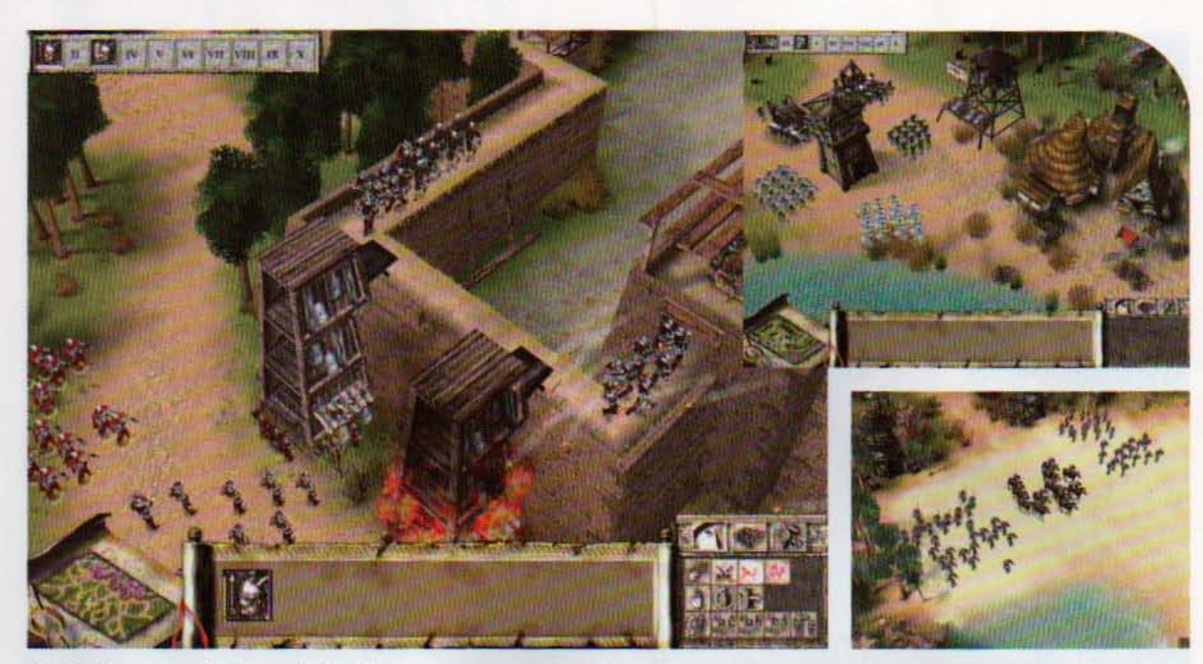
Praetorians is a realtime strategy title, utilising an attractive 3D engine which opts for the now de rigueur single-position view rather than a user-controlled camera. In the PC-RTS wars, the challenge of creating a game with an effective control system that takes full advantage of the possibilities of the third dimension has been pretty much abandoned in favour of returning to variations on the *Command & Conquer* blueprint.

But at least with Pyro's impressive and highly polished track record, *Praetorians* should be a fine example of its type. In fact, because it deals with similar material to *Age of Empires* – and *Praetorians'* release date appears to put the game in direct competition with Ensemble's upcoming *Age of Mythology* – it will be interesting to see which of the great PC game innovators manages to outdo its rival.

It's in two areas that Pyro's effort most diverges from what you'd expect. First, the resource-management element has been almost completely abandoned in favour of a model which concentrates solely on conflicts. While not an unprecedented move – with the critical-success-if-sales-failure of *Ground Control* playing with similar ideas, and surprise-hit *Sudden Strike* doing likewise – it's certainly an unusual deviation from the template. Mid-mission, you can only expect reinforcements from an army's Centurions ordering new troops to be trained in the occasional village, and this is relatively minor.

Second, and perhaps more interestingly, is the implementation of Siege warfare. Despite being long-desired, previous attempts to dramatise castle-storming conflicts have been deeply unsatisfactory. The otherwise exemplary *Shoguns*, for example, were little more than mass-mêlées through a single channel, and even the fortification centred *Stronghold* didn't prove entirely successful. Including both siege-engines and defences, *Praetorians* certainly looks the part.

While clearly much remains to be changed before its November release, in its current state *Praetorians* seems a long way from the genre-renovating title realtime strategy games require. While perhaps lacking for fans of the future, the devoted should find much to appeal in this digital dramatisation of history.



Attacking fortresses requires the construction of siege towers, which take a concerted effort to destroy. A key rule is that any equipment a player is able to construct can in turn be demolished by foes



While the game's polygonal, the view can only be switched between two positions for ease of use





While the barbarians lack the organisation of the Romans, their more labouring classes are useful for constructing ballista (above). Woods provide good concealment for troops (left)

Barbarian

Format: **PlayStation**
Publisher: **Virgin Interactiv**
Developer: **Saffir**
Origin: **U**
Release: **Ma**

Saffire's bold 3D adaptation of a mid-'80s cause célèbre, the head-lopping slash 'em up Barbarian, looks set to woo gamers eager for fresh pommel fodder





Like all mêlée combat games, so much rides on the 'feel' of the controls and the implementation of good collision detection. Alas, a decapitation move seems unlikely



Environments range from mountainous peaks to more claustrophobic interiors, and you're also able to use bits of scenery in combat. Hopefully, aggressive types will find such entertainment cathartic

With pixellated decapitations, a bloody image on the front cover of 'Crash' magazine and box art employing the charms of Wolf (of 'Gladiators' fame) and Maria Whittaker, the original *Barbarian* caused quite a stir in 1987. But the actual game was rather good, too, delivering some of the most fluid animation, impressive grunt FX and balanced fighting moves for its day. A tough legacy for Saffire to follow.

Hopefully, the move to the 3D arena will add depth and sophistication to the violent premise. Although the plots are unlikely to be the stuff of Tolstoy, each of the ten selectable characters will progress through the game along different paths, encountering different enemies and scenarios en route. Along with secret routes, 110 such encounters are promised. Typical situations vary from protecting henchmen to catching barrels hurled from above and then using them as a stairway to reach your foe.

In fact, the environments will offer many objects and features for the player to crush, throw, destroy and generally harass with an axe. Rip trees out of the ground, snap bones away from the carcasses of long-dead beasts, and pummel and smash walls by brute force alone. There are 12 expansive arenas to explore, offering locales as diverse as swamps to ancient fortresses. Battling under a waterfall will hopefully be one of the game's stand-out moments.

There's still too little information on the combat itself to make a decent assessment about *Barbarian*'s chances and current lack of playable code leaves obvious question marks. Simple attacks bolstered by more outrageous combos are expected with the developer boasting that players are able to hold each other in death grips, fling opponents around the environments, and even use bodies as flailing weapons.

Spells also make an appearance – but you'll have to experiment with different combos and attacks before you can perform any effective magical feats. The system operates via runes: trigger the correct sequence of moves and the rune's power, assisted by some impressive pyrotechnics, is unleashed against your nearest foe.

Those who have already invested in a PS2 multitap will be pleased to hear that the peripheral is fully supported by *Barbarian*. Although this is unlikely to capture the glory days and drama of the great wrestlers, such an addition can only be good for PS2 multitap gaming.

Freedom Force

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Irrational Games**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q2**

Previously in **E**98

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's early Freedom Force code, and a first chance for **Edge** to glimpse Irrational's band of superheroes in action

When **Edge** first saw *Freedom Force* back in **E**98, it was the imagination, atmosphere and polish that really impressed. Now, as the development process nears closure, it's a relief to see that nothing's changed and that the game's delivery is still near-impeccable, capturing the spirit of comics' Silver Age perfectly.

Bright, colourful and exuding fun from every 'Whack!' effects bubble, *Freedom Force* is absolutely true to its roots. Tongue-in-cheek overblown cut-scenes frame the action, comic-book retrospectives provide background on each character, and while the voice acting occasionally strays a little too far into irony, it's always delivered with warmth.

The campaign that unfolds sees a band of newly born superheroes, created by a randomly scattered radioactive extra-terrestrial chemical, drawn together into a typically grand fight against communism and alien threat. You start off with just one – the all-American hero, Minuteman – but soon, as you progress through the mission-based structure, your team expands to encompass all Irrational's smartly-named own-brand superheroes; El Diablo, Man-Bot, Bullet, Alche-Miss and more.

The point-and-click combat takes place in realtime with an active pause, most similar to *Baldur's Gate II*, and comes with a few pleasant twists. Just about every object in the game has a damage bar, from trashcans up to skyscrapers, which means persistently careless evil-fighters will find their environments disintegrating around them.

The stat-building reward mechanism deducts points for unwarranted damage to the cities, so it pays to be careful, but since your fighters find it second nature to pick up cars and lampposts and use them as weapons, sometimes it's tempting to stop playing nice. Victory in the battle against evil is much easier if you play by evil's rules.

Even in the thick of the action, there's plenty of time to make those binary good/evil decisions. Right-clicking pauses the action and calls up a context-sensitive ability menu, enabling you to pick pieces of scenery up, or to choose from a range of attack and defensive options appropriate to each character. These range from the mind-controlling effects, through fire-burst range attacks, right down to the unsubtle-but-satisfying 'Hulk Smash'-style power punches. Indeed, learning appropriate combinations of superheroes – finding squads that work well together, and powers that are devastating when used in combination – looks to be much of *Freedom Force*'s charm.







Some can fly, some can leap tall buildings, some can lift buses and some can shoot lasers from their eyes. It's playground fantasy, and it's always frantic

Those expecting subtlety, though, may be disappointed. The build **Edge** received, labelled 80 per cent complete, exhibited astonishingly flawed AI, with supposedly dumb opponents exhibiting super-sensory perception in the face of superhero presence, or failing to notice when a thrown car misses their head by inches. While it's too early to make a seriously critical judgement, a tactical RPG in which tactics prove unimportant will almost certainly prove flawed, and it's this route Irrational will have to work hard to avoid.

Still, the character customisation and creations aspects are shaping up to be one of the most rewarding aspects of the game, and perhaps its focus. The superhero creation kit has already been released to a mod-hungry PC community, and there are unlicensed fan-built meshes and skins for an impressive amount of popular heroes and villains – including, a quick **Edge** Internet search revealed, various iterations of Batman, Superman, Spider-Man, and that perennial kids' cartoon favourite, JFK. Players will be able to take their favourites online for multiplayer battles and, if the online side of things takes off, it may render any disappointments in the singleplayer campaign irrelevant.







Speech bubbles caption the action, informing you of damage dealt and enemy status. While the game's core is stat-based, the action is simpler than that implies, hiding numbers behind cartoon violence

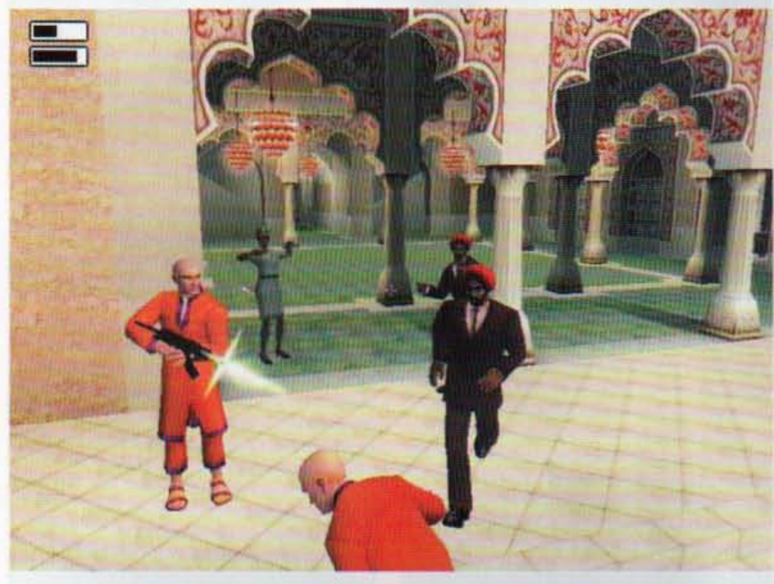
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

Format: PS2, Xbox, P
Publisher: Eidos Interacti
Developer: Io Interacti
Origin: U
Release: March (PC), August (PS2, Xbo

From casinos to lavish society balls, the life of a professional cleaner can be rather glamorous. But will the sequel to the flawed Hitman have all the creases ironed-out?







There are two kinds of stealth in videogames: the kind that involves sneaking around enemies to reach an objective with the emphasis firmly on avoidance rather than confrontation, and the kind that encourages soft footfalls followed by a frenzy of violence. *Hitman*'s raison d'être falls most definitely in the latter camp. Fibrewire garottes, serrated knives, laser-sighted pistols and the obligatory sniper rifle were all included in the original title as tools for dispatching enemies.

But there was something lacking. The vital element of tension was missing because of poor AI and infuriating game design. Imagine spending up to half an hour on a given level, only to be defeated by a particularly prescient security guard who could hear the sound of a garotte being prepared at 30 paces – and from behind him. Gun barrels poking through adversaries' chests, instant death scenarios, lax controls and lengthy cut-scenes didn't help matters. A real pity because Io Interactive certainly had the makings of a mouthwatering recipe best served cold.

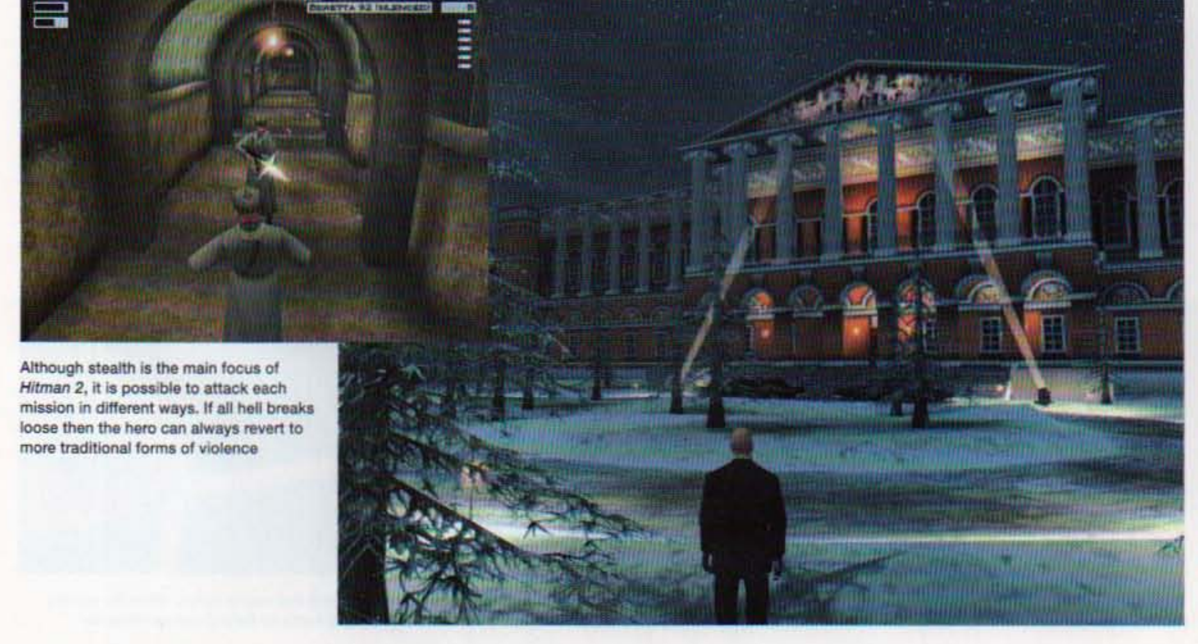
This PC update will contain 20 separate missions, spanning locations as diverse as Sicily, St Petersburg, Japan, Malaysia and India. However, the developer promises that the content of the console versions will be identical, although controls will be adapted to suit the relative joypads. Those troubled by the increasing number of shoddy PC ports to PS2 will be pleased to hear that the team began work on the PS2 version first. "We wanted to make this a console game first and foremost," says producer, **Neil Donnel**. "The renderer, lighting system and engine have been built for PS2 and an assist function will make targeting easier."

In terms of objectives, there will be fewer 'Rambo'-style missions, the emphasis firmly on careful planning and surveillance. Maps, disguises and hints will aid you in making decisions about how to infiltrate buildings in the most efficient manner. A novel peeping-Tom feature should also thrill voyeurs. The sequel will enable the player to look through keyholes to get a glimpse of rooms before entering. A potential victim's movement can then be studied in realtime before they're rudely disturbed.

Mid-mission save points and improved AI will also hopefully ease some of the frustrations experienced in the first title. If such elements come together successfully, *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin* could well prove to be a more direct and brutal rival to the softly-softly approach espoused by *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*.



Sniper scopes and weapons are, of course, included. Hopefully, the AI is advanced enough for enemies to recognise fallen colleagues



Although stealth is the main focus of *Hitman 2*, it is possible to attack each mission in different ways. If all hell breaks loose then the hero can always revert to more traditional forms of violence



Codename 47 is able to don a number of disguises throughout the game to aid the infiltration process

TOCA Race Driver

Format: **PlayStation2, PC**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **June**

Previously in **E**101

42 cars, 38 international circuits, 13 championships – more details emerge on Codemasters' first next-gen TOCA outing



Lexus IS200, Alfa Romeo 147, MG ZS, Peugeot 406 Coupé, Vauxhall Astra Coupé, Alfa Romeo GTV, Mitsubishi Mirage, Subaru Impreza WRX Type-R STI Version 6, Toyota Chaser, Dodge Neon Highline Sedan GT-R, Eagle Talon (Turbo), Proton Satria Gti, DPRS T-230, Saab 95 Aero, Audi TT, Mercedes CLK, Opel Astra Coupé, Ford Falcon, Holden Commodore SS (VX), Toyota Supra Mk4 93-98 Turbo, Lotus Sport Elise...

Bigger, better, more. An overused expression, sure, but one that most accurately describes the latest *TOCA* effort. The narrative-based approach (following a driver's career through numerous championships) remains, of course, and is easily the game's most interesting feature. However, racing fans will be salivating over the recently disclosed real track listings, the most ever to appear in a videogame: UK (Brands Hatch – Indy and GP circuits, Oulton Park, Silverstone, Donington Park, Knockhill, Rockingham Motor Speedway – International and Oval circuits); Germany (Hockenheimring – Short and GP circuits, Nurburgring, Oschersleben, Norisring); Australia (Phillip Island, Oran Park, Adelaide, Eastern Creek Raceway, Canberra, Bathhurst, Sandown International); France (Magny Cours, Dijon Prenois); Americas (Charlotte, Mexico City, Vancouver, Bristol Speedway, Searspoint, Las Vegas); Spain (Catalunya); Italy (Monza, Vallelunga); Japan (Fuji, TI Circuit AIDA); The Netherlands (Zandvoort); Sweden (Mantorp Park); Belgium (Zolder); Austria (A1 Ring).

The vehicle list is equally impressive, and while **Edge** has yet to test-drive it, given the series' track record there should be little to worry about regarding the play mechanics. *Race Driver* should roll out of the pits as engaging as its predecessors.





...Chevrolet Cavalier Z24 Coupé, Chevrolet Corvette Z06, Chevrolet Monte Carlo with Stock Car bodykit, and a further 18 yet to be announced

Super Trucks

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Jester Interactive**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **April**

Jester takes on the big guys in a race-track sim with a difference: hulking great trucks boasting all the manoeuvrability of a dead elephant





Many authentic circuits from around the world have been included, among them Alastaro in Finland, and Spain's Nogaro and Jarama

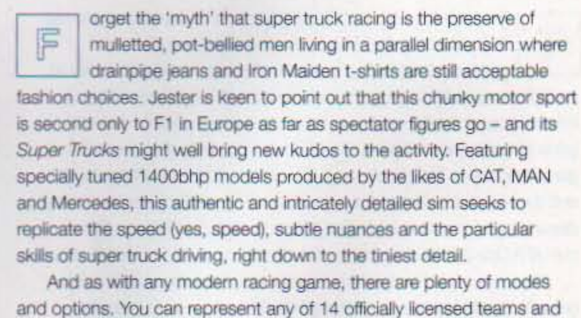


Super Trucks replays have been directed by Formula One cameramen, and can be saved to memory card for subsequent humiliation

Forget the 'myth' that super truck racing is the preserve of mulletted, pot-bellied men living in a parallel dimension where drainpipe jeans and Iron Maiden t-shirts are still acceptable fashion choices. Jester is keen to point out that this chunky motor sport is second only to F1 in Europe as far as spectator figures go – and its *Super Trucks* might well bring new kudos to the activity. Featuring specially tuned 1400bhp models produced by the likes of CAT, MAN and Mercedes, this authentic and intricately detailed sim seeks to replicate the speed (yes, speed), subtle nuances and the particular skills of super truck driving, right down to the tiniest detail.

And as with any modern racing game, there are plenty of modes and options. You can represent any of 14 officially licensed teams and then tweak handling to compensate for weather and damage (which is realistically simulated,of course). Various Championship, Arcade and Time Trial modes, as well as a splitscreen option, are also provided.

The big question is whether the enormous differences between truck and car racing will come out in a mere console simulation. There is plenty of potential here, though – and, goodness knows, we need some new ideas and experiences in the racing genre.





Britney's Dance Beat

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: TH
Developer: En
Origin: Japa
Release: Ap

The makers of the so-chic-it-hurts Bust A Move are inspired to create yet another toe-tapping PS2 dance venture, this time with canny young pop princess Ms Spears





Ms Spears jives encouragingly on as your dancer (Rob, Elna, Carla, Dan or Enrique) cuts up a sizeable rug on the dancefloor

One, and only one, licensed game released this year could afford to be truly awful – and that's *Britney's Dance Beat*. A picture of the coquettish superstar on the cover is enough to guarantee platinum sales in every territory. However, THQ has done the decent thing and handed development duties to Enix, responsible for 1998's disco-dancing hit, *Bust A Move*, the first title to take *PaRappa's* musical 'Simon Says' gameplay and transfer it to dancing.

Britney's Dance Beat retains the formula (ie buttons are pressed in time with the music to correspond with symbols shown onscreen), but puts a new spin on the process. Here you choose a backing dancer and then audition them through a series of dance-offs to get on stage with Ms Spears. Naturally, the backing tracks include several classic Brit hits, plus the chance to unlock videoclips, live footage and exclusive songs as you progress. Fans disappointed that they won't be able to play as their heroine will be pleased to note that she's in the game dancing beside you, and she looks pretty hot. (Rumours abound that you'll be able to unlock her as a playable character anyway.)

If all goes well with this title, THQ is considering expanding the franchise to other artists. **Edge** will be beginning its S Club 7 Dance Beat petition very soon.



Carla, Rob and Leana threaten to smash the Thigh-Chaffing record as the Britney soundtrack pumps ever higher. Featured hits to bop till you drop to include 'Baby, One More Time', 'Slave 4 U' and 'Overprotected'. It's worth pointing out *BDB* is dance mat compatibl

Klonoa Beach Volley

Format: PlayStatio
Publisher: Namc
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Spring (Japa

It's for kids, honest. Retro Klonoa goes sand-busting with cute 'n' nauseous pals for some not-so-serious seaside net action on PSone. Anyone for ice-cream? Thought not

The recent success of *Dragon Quest IV* in Japan has proved that there's life in PSone yet – and there are plenty of publishers still willing to exploit the aged machine, if only to provide increasingly eccentric fare such as *Klonoa Beach Volley*, a colourful cartoon take on one of the world's silliest sports. Namco has gone all-out for the kiddie audience here, not just in the look of the game but also in the simple controls – Pass, Attack and Special Hit – and the fact that the computer chooses which action you need to take, depending on the phase of play: Attack or Defence. Players can even pull off a Special Attack which shifts the action to another dimension…

However, what Namco has patently ignored while planning this game is that a) the character the game is based around – ageing platform hero Klonoa – has seen his popularity wane considerably in recent GBA, Wonderswan and PS2 sequels to the PSone original, and b) judging by recent sales figures, it doesn't seem to be kids who are still buying PSone hardware or software anyway. Still, the simultaneous fourplayer option should pull in a few punters – although if Namco is after substantial copy sales then replacing this Klonoa franchise with *Nina Williams' Wet T-shirt Volleyball Party* would likely prove more effective.



Any more emphasis that this is a kiddy title and you'd have to cut the sprites out yourself. Many familiar googly-eyed characters from the Klonoa pantheon turn up to play, so gurgling youngsters will suckle long on the cute 'n' cuddly visuals



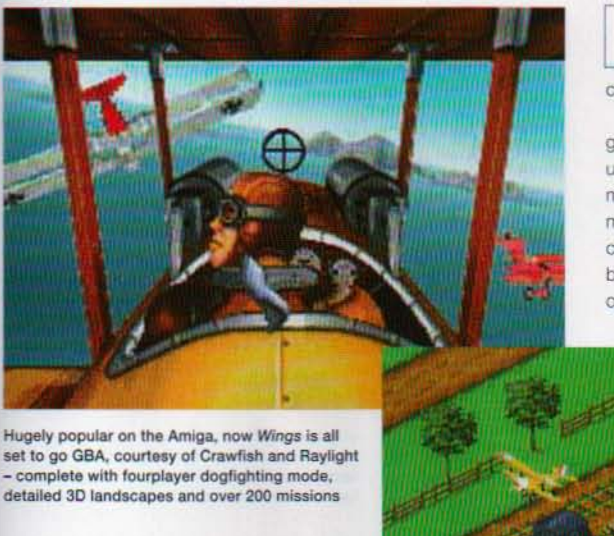


All the players boast a Special Hit feature that when activated propels the ball over the net (hopefully) by some innovative method

Wings Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Crawfish**
Developer: **Crawfish/Raylight Studios**
Origin: **UK/Italy**
Release: **Q2**

3D World War I combat goes colour portable with Crawfish's ambitious adaptation of an Amiga stalwart – but will the project fly true on Nintendo's diminutive player?



Hugely popular on the Amiga, now *Wings* is all set to go GBA, courtesy of Crawfish and Raylight – complete with fourplayer dogfighting mode, detailed 3D landscapes and over 200 missions

Looks like the Amiga is proving as rich a source of GBA material as the SNES, with the likes of *Speedball* and *International Karate* already across, and *Wings* – the WWI combat flight sim from Cinemaware – now chugging onto the runway.

Following the main career path of the original, players start out as green rookies, progressing through the ranks as the challenges mount until they reach the giddy heights of the aeronautical elite. There are 200 missions in all to complete, with a multi-path storyline ensuring each mission is allocated according to previous performance. You can choose to play as either an Allied or German pilot, and 3D dogfights, bombing and strafing all feature. Crawfish also promises full control over the plane – quite a feat considering the GBA's dinky ergonomics.

The development team is also making some extravagant boasts for the visuals, which will include highly detailed plane models, lashings of scenery (including ocean, desert, snow, etc) and impressive smoke, lens flare and explosion effects. You can also expect some cunning enemy AI and a 'huge' final boss. Perhaps the most exciting prospect, though, is the fourplayer dogfighting mode. It's just the sort of innovative multiplayer concept we're beginning to expect from GBA developers.





Be a Brit fighting for flag, fame and freedom, or a German aeronaut who's eager to prove his Teutonic mettle to the almighty Vaterland...

Shining Soul

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March 23 (Japan)**

Reconfigured for a younger generation, Sega's latest addition to its classic RPG saga has undergone some extensive internal surgery – but the outlook is promising





Be a human warrior, a dragon warrior, a wizard or an elf archer. There are four character types in all – and many prettified backdrops to savour



Presumably, the improved visuals will be more in keeping with the expectations of your regular clued-up GBA owner. The realtime, as opposed to turn-based, gameplay suggests as much

Although *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* draw much of the publicity, Sega's *Shining Force* series – spanning the Mega Drive, Game Gear and Saturn – is arguably comparable as an RPG benchmark. Unlike Square's and Enix's titles, however, *Shining Force* occupied a more cerebral battle tactics subgenre, utilised by the likes of *Front Mission* and *Robot Taisen*. Visually, this incarnation is immediately recognisable as a *Shining* sibling, although the turn-based gameplay has now been jettisoned in favour of a realtime alternative. Fans of ye olde gameplay might not be impressed.

Structurally, it's familiar RPG ground. Players choose from four user-definable heroes and then progress through a series of dungeon stages, facing end-of-level bosses and the odd semi-boss halfway through. Equipping your hero is the key to success and the usual arsenal of weapons is available – either through shops or treasure chests. Which all sounds astonishingly formulaic. However, Sega is also including a fourplayer cooperative mode, where link-up players (who all own a copy of the game) can go off and explore different areas, exchanging items when they meet up again. Is GBA really set to become a social tool? If so, it will mean some people will have to stop playing it on the toilet. Presumably.

Tactical Ops: Assault on Terror

Format: PC
Publisher: Infogrames
Developer: Kamehan Studios
Origin: France
Release: May

Prepare yourselves for sensationalist tabloid headlines as Infogrames' latest FPS brings more realism to an already bloody battlefield...

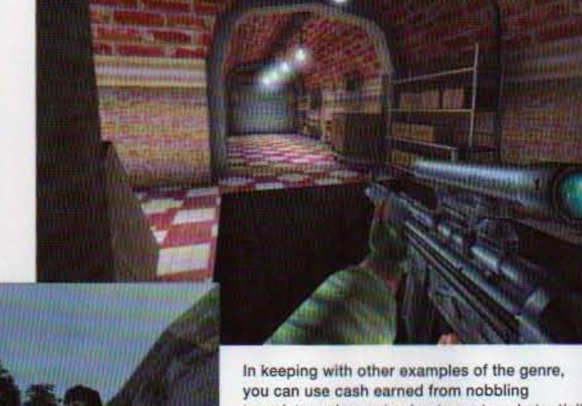




***Unreal*'s heavyweight engine shoulders the graphics duties – but Kamehan Studios has no doubt put its own mark on the bloodletting**

The realistic military shooter is turning out to be *the* genre of 2002, with *Medal of Honor, SOCOM, Conflict Desert Storm* and now *Tactical Ops* all set to glare menacingly at each other across Electronics Boutique this year. The genre is, of course, riding the wave of popular interest in armed conflict that followed the war in Afghanistan, and it's *Tactical Ops* that draws closest to that source.

This is a 'semi-realistic' (sic) counter-terrorism romp, pitching you into gruesomely familiar scenarios, as either the spec op forces or terror merchants themselves. There are even stages set in the deserts of the Middle-East, although Antarctic and western urban locations add a more fictional tang to the proceedings. Online gamers will already be familiar with the name – a few months back, Infogrames made a downloadable beta available – but this updated retail version adds new maps, skins and visual flourishes. Naturally, there's a vast section of real-world weaponry to snap up; players can pick up cash for shooting terrorists or saving hostages, which can then be spent on better weapons, armour or gadgets. Of course, there are moral questions behind such an authentic simulation. Is the videogame industry ready to face this kind of debate? Given the levels of realism achievable now, it had better be.



In keeping with other examples of the genre, you can use cash earned from nobbling terrorists and rescuing hostages to substantially bolster your weapons and gadgets quota

Whacked!

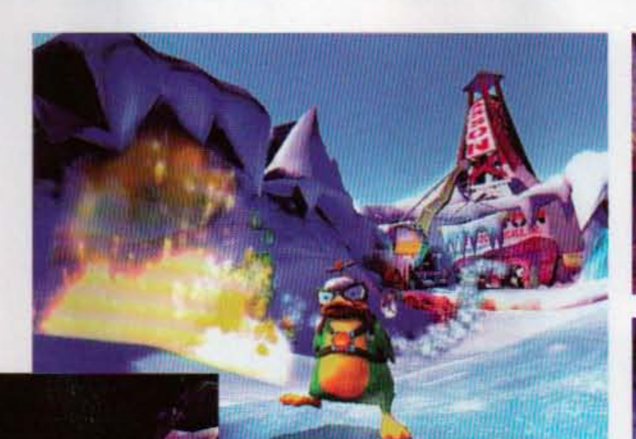
Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Presto Studios
Origin: US
Release: Autumn

Just as Edge goes to press Microsoft announces a new title for its console. Colourful, vibrant, frantic... fun?

"Fast and furious combat where eight demented contestants are pitted against each other in the world's most irreverent and dangerous game show," says the press release. Which is really only significant given that Presto Studios has previously focused on photorealistic epics such as *Myst III: Exile* and *Journeyman Project*.

Whacked! therefore represents something of a departure for the devco – free-for-all combat, power-ups and outlandish weapons (over 40 of them, including circus cannon, giant staplers, rubber ducky grenades and shish kebab, among others) are elements that would have previously failed to make it into any of Presto's titles. Further unfamiliar territory can be seen in the variety of play options which include Combat mode (players fight each other in a race to collect the most resources), Chicken mode (you in a survival battle against man-eating chickens), King of the Hill, Grab 'n' Run, Fragfest and Dodgeball. The level design and theme reflect the game's relaxed approach to realism.

Dismissing a game before playable code emerges is not only unprofessional but unfair, and while **Edge** isn't passing any judgement on Presto Studio's title at this stage, history is littered with similar games failing to live up to similar claims made. Hopefully this will prove one of the rare exceptions.



As you'd expect by now, the various distinctive characters boast individual abilities which come into effect during the relentless multiplayer bouts





Very colourful, very hectic and also very worrying. Let's hope Presto Studios gets things just right

Rolling

Format: **PlayStation2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Rage**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Autumn**

Top technical advice from the sport's leading gurus lends the necessary kudos to Rage's fringe skate sim



It may not have quite the crossover appeal of BMX or skateboarding but, with Rage behind the machine, inline skating could be the next Big Thing on your PS2 or Xbox

With the BMX, skateboarding and snowboarding categories well and truly jammed, publishers are having to look ever deeper into the extreme sports larder for tasty new tidbits, ripe for conversion. Infogrames has already bagged surfing, so now Rage sets its sights on aggressive inline skating with this apparently realistic and in-depth simulation.

The company is certainly making all the required extreme sports noises. *Rolling* will feature 18 top skaters from around the world, as well as accurate representations of several international skate parks, including Escondido in Cali and RollerParc Avenue in Paris. Familiar brands will also be available, both in terms of equipment and clothing. To complete the essential extreme sports simulation package, there'll also be an hour of video footage filmed by renowned rollerblading videographers Drew Bachrach and Dave Paine.

Gameplay will naturally feature hundreds of real tricks, and Rage is building the main play mode around a 'non-linear reputation-driven storyline', which sounds intriguing. However, inline skating lacks the mass market cool appeal of skateboarding or BMX, so the developer has a hell of a task on their hands – Rage cannot fall back on David Beckham this time.





Both street and vert forms of inline skating are included, and technical assistance has been provided by top skaters from around the world

Apocalyptica

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Extreme FX**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **September (PC), 2003 (Xbox)**

Extreme FX reveals another strange end to the world – but early signs suggest this shooter could be a chip off a decidedly new block





A predictable fusion of medieval and future aesthetic doesn't necessarily bode ill – if Extreme FX can pull off an innovative mêlée system



A thirdperson perspective marks an interesting change from your typical FPS, but expect the usual glimmering phantasmagoria of spell and weapon effects during combat

Does PC gaming still have an image problem? Although titles of the stature of *Black & White*, *Deus Ex* and *Operation Flashpoint* deliver experiences with freshness and complexity, the perception that a trenchcoat and Nine Inch Nails T-shirt are required fashion accessories for the GeForce3 fetishist is deep-rooted. *Apocalyptica* is unlikely to dispel such notions. Set in a 'dark future where mankind sways on the edge of the abyss', the game ticks all the appropriate PC cliché boxes, from the dour apocalyptic backdrop right through to the gravelly cigar-smoker's voiceovers. Which isn't to say the game will turn out bad; it's just a little hackneyed.

In its favour, the title is attempting to advance the traditional arena combat game – by using a thirdperson perspective and focusing on mêlée combat. Weapons will be suitably beefy and are to include the Bible Basher ('it fires paper aeroplanes of holy energy'), the Incense Mace and the Sword of Restoration (which transfers energy from a struck opponent to the wielder). Spellcasting, four selectable characters and a host of multiplayer games should also add depth.

But the game's success will largely depend on how well the mêlée combat hangs together. An interesting and terrifying prospect.

Star Wars Jedi Starfighter

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Activision
Developer: LucasArts
Origin: US
Release: March

Starfighter sequel preserves balance of original while offering first look at Episode II technology





Stoking the lust for unlockable *Episode II* tidbits, *Jedi Starfighter* also enhances the original game's mechanics with stunning Force attacks – like this

Perhaps the biggest selling point of LucasArts' *Starfighter* sequel is that it will offer the first substantial glimpse of interactive *Episode II* material. Although not based on 'Attack of the Clones', the game will mark the first proper appearance of the eponymous Jedi Starfighter, piloted by Jedi Council member Adi Gallia, as well as showcase the return of the original game's alien pirate, Nym. Aside from this, play mechanics, interface and structure will largely be familiar to anyone who's played the original.

So against a backdrop narrative that features Count Dooku, 15 missions play out, featuring the same kinds of secret objectives and hidden craft that enlivened the first game in the series. There's even a tantalising glimpse of LucasArts' forthcoming 'Episode II' forays to unlock. But the major innovation inspired by the new Jedi craft is the use of Force powers – Force Shield, Force Lightning, Force Shockwave, and the 'bullet time'-precipitating Force Reflex. Interestingly, these are activated with a nod to *BeMani*-style timing. Although this threatens to add a layer of complication to the game's controls, especially when combined with commanding your wingmen, in practice it's quite easy to grasp. A twoplayer cooperative mode is also a welcome addition to the mix.



15 missions, a panoply of recognisable and not-so-recognisable Star Wars hardware – plus a cooperative twoplayer mode – promise to add a new level of excitement to the ship-blasting

Star Wars Racer Revenge

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Activision
Developer: LucasArts
Origin: US
Release: March

LucasArts chooses a more obviously mainstream route for its latest next-generation 'Star Wars' sequel

The original N64 version of *Episode I Racer* suffered from unfairly negative comparisons to other, more conventional, future racing titles. It actually demonstrated several deft touches: the subtly nuanced handling made excellent use of the analogue stick, for example; the variable reward structure was an interesting twist; and the customisation scheme pleasingly intuitive.

Taking place eight years after the original Boonta Eve Classic, this PS2 sequel seems to eschew such innovative little foibles, pursuing a more standardised *Wipeout*-clone route instead. Consequently, the delicacy of the original's handling gives way to just a boost and powerslide – which will no doubt be more comprehensible to the mainstream consumer. The sense of speed has been increased, to shape up more convincingly against comparable titles, too, and the AI more finely tuned, with a greater emphasis on racer-to-racer shenanigans, as in the movie.

There'll also be a mix of new and familiar faces, fighting it out over nine tracks, and as you'd expect of a PS2 title, it all looks a considerable sight better than the original. It's just not clear at this stage whether the more accessible formula of the sequel will match, fall short of, or exceed the idiosyncratic charms of its predecessor.



Souped up for PS2, the benefits aren't just cosmetic. Taking heed of criticisms levelled at the original title, LucasArts has racked up the speed and jettisoned some of the quirkier elements in a concerted streamlining effort





Over 16 Pod racers are vying for the top spot. Sebulba's hacked off at his earlier defeat, but Anakin's matured into a first class speedster

Taz Wanted

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Blitz Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **May**

The latest outing for the short-tempered Looney Tunes marsupial looks like it could make an effective 3D platformer

Adapting a licence is always fraught with peril – but Blitz Games by all accounts is steering clear of the usual pitfalls. Visually, *Taz Wanted* will capture that Looney Tunes mentality to a tee

Given the pitfalls that licensed titles can fall into, *Taz Wanted* is actually looking like it could be a reasonable prospect when it's released early this summer. Visually, it benefits from some well-realised cel-shading effects, with Taz's signature spin particularly well done. Structurally, it boasts the now familiar hub structure leading to levels with multiple goals, à la *Jak and Daxter* or *Super Mario 64*. However, there's still some ground to cover before it can be considered the equal of either of these two – a few of the finer points of the game's mechanics need to be tightened up, as does the handling in some respects.

But essentially Blitz Games' attempt to update the Looney Tunes spirit seems to be working quite well, with the eponymous Taz spinning and eating his way through the destructible scenery in a bid to escape the clutches of the perennially cantankerous Yosemite Sam. Various minigames and boss battles punctuate the action, and Taz can acquire special powers by picking up a different costume in each level, ranging from stealthy ninja to hip-hop bad boy.

And with 2,000 polygons per character model, there's significant scope for detailed enough characterisation to do the licence justice – at least visually.





With a spin and a yelp, Taz makes his way back to Tasmania, obliterating Taz Wanted posters and chewing up the toon scenery with aplomb

Turok Evolution

Format: **Xbox, PS2, GC**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **Acclaim Studio Austin**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Winter**

Previously in **E**107

Acclaim reforges the best of Turok and turns in a capable addition to the FPS canon – just don't expect to see any boundaries being pushed...





Health works along traditional lines, with pickups available in certain locations. A 'gate' save point mechanism should make progress less frustrating

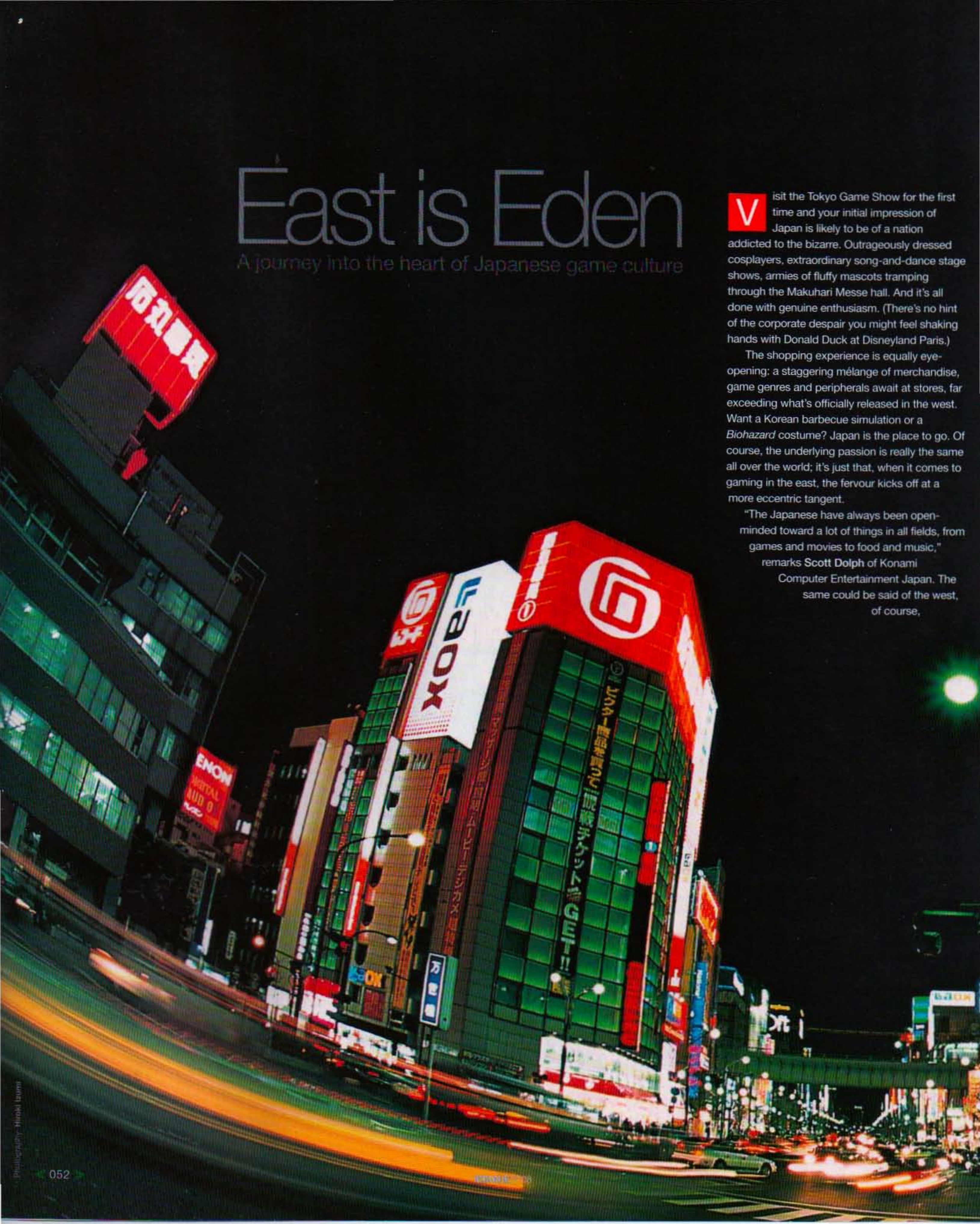


According to the developer, the AI still needs much tweaking. Current code displays enemies with a gung-ho attitude to warfare, streaming out of doorways towards the player. Hopefully they'll exhibit more cunning come the final release

Fans of the original *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* on N64 have reason to be cheerful. Recent playable code suggests Acclaim Studio Austin's assertion (**E**107) that the series is going back to its roots is spot on. The team has concentrated on all the elements which made the first title so enjoyable, eschewing the mindless wandering of *Turok 2* in favour of big enemies, big guns and, thankfully, clear signposting through the levels.

However, in terms of new ideas and groundbreaking elements, there's little to crow about. The added flight sections are a welcome addition, but hardly the stuff of genius. Instead, the game focuses on the staples of the FPS genre: sniper scopes, aggressive AI and largish levels – with demarcated paths. One playable section presents the task of lowering several bridge sections by finding trigger mechanisms in key locations. You get the impression that this is hardly pushing any boundaries in terms of level design.

But the controls, gadgets (including a remote device which can distract guards) and general atmosphere are all excellent. (Indeed, so much effort has gone into recording sounds that one member of the team was arrested outside a school for repeatedly dropping a handgun on the pavement.) Well worth keeping an eye on.



Photography: Hiroki Izumi

East is Eden

A journey into the heart of Japanese game culture

Visit the Tokyo Game Show for the first time and your initial impression of Japan is likely to be of a nation addicted to the bizarre. Outrageously dressed cosplayers, extraordinary song-and-dance stage shows, armies of fluffy mascots tramping through the Makuhari Messe hall. And it's all done with genuine enthusiasm. (There's no hint of the corporate despair you might feel shaking hands with Donald Duck at Disneyland Paris.)

The shopping experience is equally eye-opening: a staggering mélange of merchandise, game genres and peripherals await at stores, far exceeding what's officially released in the west. Want a Korean barbecue simulation or a *Biohazard* costume? Japan is the place to go. Of course, the underlying passion is really the same all over the world; it's just that, when it comes to gaming in the east, the fervour kicks off at a more eccentric tangent.

"The Japanese have always been open-minded toward a lot of things in all fields, from games and movies to food and music," remarks **Scott Dolph** of Konami Computer Entertainment Japan. The same could be said of the west, of course,



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To a western visitor a Akihabara game store can be a bewildering place. Among the PS2, GameCube and Dreamcast titles it will be possible to find Famicom, Super Famicom and Mega Drive titles. Indeed, many stores are likely to stock just as many retro gems as modern games. Prices are generally cheaper, too. For game enthusiasts there is no better place in the world









but as far as gaming's concerned, that passion is expressed more overtly. Japan's small land mass, coupled with an advanced distribution system, is a contributing factor. "The simple fact that they're used to seeing and experiencing different things from their childhood days makes it easier for Japanese to appreciate them with no hesitation," continues Dolph. A similar attitude is evident in how freely the Japanese adopt foreign words into the Japanese vocabulary, including Cantonese. Similarly, cultural as well as linguistic cross-pollination occurs. "They go to Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines on New Year's Day, but also celebrate Christmas," adds Dolph. "It's just how the Japanese people are."

videogames, graphics, technology and game concept were secondary. The Japanese like to be told a story with intense feelings, and it is no accident that RPGs were responsible for bringing videogames to the masses in the east. Recently, Japanese gamers have bought *Dragon Quest IV* and *Dragon Quest VII* en masse. Many said that they wanted to experience again the emotions provoked by the previous version. While people in the west appreciate *Metal Gear Solid 2* for its combat and attention to detail, the Japanese look to the story to support and enhance the gameplay. The importance of dialogue sequences can never be underestimated in Japan.

It was the love of narrative which brought the

The Japanese like to be told a story with intense feelings, and it is no accident that RPGs were responsible for bringing videogames to the masses

Dynamic roots

But while the Japanese embrace diversity, their penchant for conflicting colour, style and content is driven from within. The aftermath of WW2 left an entire generation traumatised. The subsequent reconstruction and new prosperity fashioned a fresh generation with hope of a brighter future. It was a particular vision which had a tremendous impact in design, comics, animation and, later, videogames. Japan developed a great creativity where robots, impossible odds, effort, unity, dramatic destiny and heroism were glorified. Raised on films such as 'King Kong vs Godzilla' (1962) and 'Ghidrah – The Three-Headed Monster' (1965), the Japanese taste for heroic battles and melodrama became renowned.

This passion for the dramatic – especially story and emotional content – became the bedrock of Japanese entertainment. Other features would evolve around that core emotional content, but in terms of early

Japanese to gaming in the early '80s. Before then, *Pong*-style gaming imported from America was available but certainly not popular. Japan's videogame history really began in 1984 with the release of Nintendo's Famicom. The two cannot be separated. Although Atari had made tentative in-roads into Tokyo's shopping districts, it was Nintendo who really knew the Japanese mindset. Nintendo realised the importance of delivering videogames as a form of toy (a reputation it has found difficult to shake in recent years) and for the first time people were able to enjoy at home what they had previously only been able to enjoy at game centres. Famicom established the first true videogame standard: commercial, social and industrial.

The Famicom fingerprint is tremendously important because it defined nearly every game genre available today. Few have changed dramatically over the decades, and subsequent hardware has only updated the old precepts with 3D visuals. The Famicom's basic graphics pushed young creators to focus on concept,

From *Biohazard* guns to cosplay collection cards, game related merchandise is big business in Japan. Replica manufacturer, Tokyo Marui hold the *Biohazard* licence and guns like the Samurai Edge can cost up to ¥25,000 (£131).

The Gamers mascot, Di Gi Charat (far left) has become so popular that spin-off games and books are now dedicated to the anime character









system and gameplay. Although many strange and insignificant titles were released, Japanese gamers agree that such esoterica were vital in encouraging developers to explore new ideas.

Nintendo's toy and card manufacturing operation gave it a wide distribution network and the Famicom reached every store in the country, becoming both a social and cultural phenomenon. Children had to acquire their own in order to be 'inside the group' and be able to discuss the same daily experiences. One title in particular triggered devotional fervour: *Dragon Quest*. Before this defining RPG, the Famicom had been a mere novelty. Even *Super Mario Bros.* and *Donkey Kong* failed to truly connect with the Japanese outlook. *Dragon Quest* was different. The blossoming of a story alongside a heroic quest switched on an entire generation to the digital age. As an interactive fairytale, people would spend hours searching for hints to resolve a situation or an entire quest. Children began speaking about games in the same way their parents argued about the last performance of the Tokyo Yomiuri Giants baseball team. People started to buy a Famicom as they would buy a TV set or a refrigerator. It became part of a normal home interior.

Spending power

Today, videogames and game-related merchandise accounts for a significant proportion of Japanese revenue. When the videogame industry slumps, so does the economy. "Japanese are heavy consumers, not just of the games but all the related goods," says **Gaku Kawaguchi** of retail chain Gamers. He describes his seven-storey shop in Tokyo's Akihabara as 'a giant toy box.' Each floor caters for a specific area: general merchandise, games, books, CDs and DVDs, trading cards, toys and models. Exhausted shoppers can even relax in the café on the top floor. Enter a game shop in Akihabara and you're likely to be assailed by a vast quantity of products, from t-shirts to PaRappa the Rapper mugs. "A popular term is 'media mix'," Kawaguchi-san says of the link between the various entertainment mediums. "It's the key to making good sales."

For many game stores, profits depend not just on the software sales but on the paraphernalia which surrounds the content and characters. "Merchandise is sold because there is a market for it – and it's quite a large one," confirms Scott Dolph. In the case of Konami's *Tokimeki Memorial*, the fans' merchandise spending can far exceed that of the game itself. Indeed, at events like the Tokyo Character Show, the *Tokimeki* stall is so crowded at peak times that the next group of customers often have to line up along its perimeter.

Perhaps due to Shinji Mikami's watch-collecting hobby, Capcom's *Biohazard* merchandise collection includes a range of timepieces, starting from around ¥10,000 (£52). A 5th Anniversary Limited Edition S.T.A.R.S Flieger Chronograph by watchmaker GSX will set a fan back ¥62,000 (£325). Beyond t-shirts, an armour vest at ¥13,000 (£68) and winter jacket at ¥29,000 (£152) are only a part of the sizable clothing line. Decked head to toe in *Biohazard* gear, enthusiasts can complete the image and arm themselves with a replica of the arsenal featured throughout the series. Replica manufacturer Tokyo Marui holds the game licence and releases limited *Biohazard* badged editions of guns such as the Samurai Edge for ¥25,000 (£131).

Though guns don't appeal to the average *Biohazard* fan, like the manga industry that targets every niche market, they can cross over to a few demographics. Kawaguchi-san explains, "Many people working in anime enjoy military stuff, as well as games, movies and the music scene a little, some perhaps on the seiyuu [voice-acting] side. Guns have a natural appeal to mechanical designers because of the mechanisms involved."

While western gamers grumble about buying an extra memory card or peripheral for their PS2, the Japanese are happy to spend great sums on accessories and items to complete their collections. "In Japan, people don't think ¥10–20,000 (£50–£100) is expensive," Kawaguchi-san continues. "Premium goods often sell out, no matter what the cost." Regular customers will stop by Gamers twice a week for their fix. On one occasion, he recalls, a customer spent ¥200,000 (£1050). By comparison, Kawaguchi-san

Because Japanese homes are very compact there is little room for a massive AV set-up. Most Japanese gamers will own a PS2 but will still make room for a Super Famicom and a GameCube. Mrs Kasai (below) began gaming after her huband started bowling. She now spends two to three hours a day playing videogames. Typical of Japanese gamers is Youji Nakano (left) who started gaming with *Super Mario Bros.* and now spends most of his time on his PS2. PC gaming is still unpopular in Japan as Bill MacPhee (centre) will attest. Most Japanese gamers say that they have never heard of any foreign developers









observes that most foreign visitors to the store tend to spend under ¥10,000 (£50) on merchandise.

Often making columns of entertaining copy in US and UK magazines are the game peripherals. "Japanese do love crazy controllers," laughs **Bill MacPhee**, a Japan resident of six years and employee at anime studio AIC, most well-known overseas for producing *Tenchi Muyo* and *Bubblegum Crisis 2040*. "But they do have to be careful about what they buy because of the space they have at home." Among the AV set-up in the lounge room is usually a US and Japanese PS2, Nintendo 64 and a PlayStation, along with peripherals such as an arcade stick. DVDs and laserdiscs also occupy the shelf space. "How many people honestly have space for a dance mat?" adds MacPhee. "I've got space for nothing now."

Dolph thinks differently, "Living space has nothing to do with buying peripherals. If it's necessary to get the most out of a title, the Japanese gamer will buy that 'weird' game along with the peripheral, if they think the game is fun." In contrast to most western gamers, most Japanese gamers would have few qualms about spending another ¥5,000 (£26) on top of the software.

The consumerism bubble

But this kind of consumerism was not always prevalent in Japan. It was only during the economy bubble of the Famicom and Super Famicom era that the Japanese acquired consumerism habits. Children would be desperate to get a game on its official release – any delay resulting in major disappointment and possible social exclusion from friends. It was also an era which the Japanese would come to term 'ethical', because piracy was frowned upon.

"Many consumers considered pirate copies to be defect products and would not buy 'bugged' versions of games," points out long-time Tokyo resident and **Edge**'s Japanese correspondent, **Christophe Kagotani**. Due to this prevailing sentiment there were very few second-hand shops and only poor families would dare to buy second-hand games. Indeed, the thought of throwing away or trading a beloved object remains anathema to the Japanese. It has long been believed that something spiritual resides in tools that people have used for many years – and, in particular, things that they have cherished or kept close to their person: needles, writing brushes, decorative combs, walking sticks, etc. Thus it was once customary to hesitate before using something that belonged to a complete stranger or to throw away an important item.

In contrast to most western gamers most Japanese gamers would have few qualms about spending another ¥5,000 on top of the software

This attitude lasted until the late '80s when the growing free market encouraged second-hand shops to emerge. In Japan, this now accounts for a large part of the videogame experience, especially after hardware and software prices increased during the PlayStation generation. According to some stores and gamers, the second-hand market has had a positive impact on piracy. But to most Japanese gamers, it has created an intense appreciation of retrogames, which, in a sense, gave a cultural foundation to videogames by endowing them with a history and a vintage value. In contrast to the Famicom era, parents are now very much in favour of the second-hand market, especially if they have two or more children to satisfy.



Mr Teruki Tsuchiya, Chaos store manager, Messe-sanoh group

Personal Visions

Mr Teruki Tsuchiya has been the manager of one of Akihabara's largest import game stores for many years. Along with Japanese and foreign games, he also stocks many UK and American game magazines, including **Edge**.

Why have you decided to sell foreign games in Japan? Are there enough players in Japan?

The store I'm in charge of has quite a history inside Messe-sanoh. It is very famous in Akihabara. Other stores have not moved on to foreign games, so we are very well known. When PlayStation and Saturn arrived, the market dropped because of the difficulty to run foreign titles on Japanese machines. This resulted in a bottleneck for us. The market went maniac, thanks to Dreamcast. Things changed dramatically as it was easier to run foreign games on a Japanese DC.

How would you describe the typical Japanese import gamer?

Overseas gamers represent around a tenth of the gamer population in Japan. Their age is quite high. I mean, these are imported products, so they are more expensive, and they need money. Most, if not all, of them are male. Yes, around 99.5 per cent. They have a deep knowledge of game history and know Atari, for example. Occasionally, we see female customers, but they're searching for very specific things, mostly based on characters like the Power Puff Girls. The starting point has been Dreamcast and especially *Dead or Alive*. When the game was first revealed, we had numerous preorders. At that time, it was only available in the US; the game wasn't scheduled on the Japanese DC. That triggered a lot of US version pre-orders. It has really been an important point for foreign game business in Japan because it attracted many new users into the market. With *Dead or Alive 2*, people understood it was quite easy to get foreign games running on their DCs. In our store we sold around 1,500 to 1,600 units of the game.

Which platform is the most popular?

At this moment, I would say Dreamcast. No doubt about that. Then I would say the Game Boy Advance and Game Boy Color. Following, you would find the N64, then PSone and then PS2. PS2 is unable to be first, because games are still not running on a Japanese model. There's not a satisfactory solution at the moment. You can buy a US PS2, but it remains too expensive. In the case of PS2, you would have to open it and proceed to make hazardous changes inside. Concerning the mod-chip, this is illegal and it casts quite a shadow on the business. For that reason, we cannot advise users to put a mod-chip inside their console. But there are some interesting games, like *GTAIII*, *Soul Reaver 2* and *Half-Life*. These games are not planned for a Japanese release so interest rises for these titles.

What are customers looking for in foreign titles?

I would say the experience, the environment. I don't speak here about graphics, but the sensation you would not find in a Japanese game – such as the violence. When you have a Japanese action game, you have a gun but you would never hit your allies on screen. In foreign titles, you can hit them – and there's blood all over the place. Another point: in foreign games the challenge is higher because you have to think for yourself. In a Japanese game, you have tutorials for everything. So there are people here who like this philosophy – think for yourself. There is always a solution to a problem.

Is the Xbox popular with import gamers?

Xbox made quite an impression, thanks to *Dead or Alive 3*. We sold around 35 units of the console. Don't forget, we are selling it at ¥80,000 (£422). I think this game will have an impact on the Japanese Xbox launch. The only problem is that there are no titles like *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest*, so Xbox would not have the same impact as PlayStation. In a way, this is a very big point of concern in Japan for the future of Xbox. There is no major RPG to come on Xbox. If Xbox has only action games, many will prefer to pass and buy another system. The Japanese have been raised with *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* on consoles so you need to have an RPG to sell any console.

The interest for Xbox exists because, like Atari, this is foreign hardware and something unusual in a market dominated by Japanese hardware makers. Plus it is supported and initiated by one of the world's biggest companies – Microsoft. People cannot ignore that.

What do you think about the second-hand market?

As you know, the second-hand issue has been brought to justice by the game-makers. Until recently, makers were opposed to the second-hand market. It's not always apparent, but there are examples where stores selling games on the second-hand market have had difficulties getting new games from publishers. This has been the situation for three years. Now a recent ruling decided that the second-hand market is legal, so the situation is changing. I think more stores will appear.

As with overseas gaming, I think people are going back to retro games as they are bored with current game design. Emulators had a big impact. Many retrogames in the second-hand market are premium class. Some would cost ¥20,000 (£104) to ¥30,000 (£157), or even up to ¥50,000 (£262). Even if these games are available on shelves, users are unable to afford them. If you own these games, you keep them protectively as their price increases with time. Many have discovered this part of videogame history, thanks to emulators. Current games focus on visuals and 3D, but their content is not as fun as earlier products. With emulators, people started to understand that you don't need great graphics to have fun. So, yes, the retro market is booming.

How would you describe the Japanese game market at the moment?

I think it's lacking something important. When you passed from Super Famicom to PlayStation, you had the polygon shock; you experienced a new 3D environment in which you were free to evolve. When you had *Virtua Fighter 2* on Saturn, you had the visual shock. You understood that consumer hardware was able to offer quite a technical and visual experience. But when the shock ended, there was not a lot left. I think manufacturers have focused too much on these graphical issues. Many were displaying beautiful movies, but players had difficulty getting involved in them. Less attention was put into game controls and features which would develop player involvement. Take *MGS2*, for example. At the end of the game, you have numerous long movies and there's not much to do, only pressing one button a few times. Super Famicom remains superior because it offers limited graphics but great gameplay. Moreover, when graphics become too beautiful or too realistic, you have more difficulty getting involved with the game. You have to put your mind inside the main character, but when this one is too detailed, you cannot associate your image to the character. But now it is worse, because of speech. *Final Fantasy X* is a perfect illustration of this. Normally, you were listening to the hero's voice inside you, but now you have it coming from the speakers.

Personal Visions

Like many Japanese gamers of his generation Kazuhiro Watanabe started his videogame journey with Nintendo's Family Computer. He now edits 'Hyper PlayStation 2' and 'Digimon Station'. His bedroom contains many gaming systems alongside his life-size model of Han Solo in carbon freeze.

How long have you been playing videogames?
From the age of 10 or 11, when I was in primary school. I started with Famicom. Most of my friends had one at the time. My parents didn't want to buy me one for quite a long time. It was a time when you had to have one if you wanted friends to play with. Then my parents agreed to get me one after all. This was the real start in the videogame world. From that time, I always played videogames. In secondary school I was in the school tennis club and I discovered a true passion for the series *Family Tennis*. So much so that I didn't attend the club anymore. The funniest thing is that I understood through this videogame just how interesting tennis was to play – and it pushed me to return to the club and play the sport for real.

But why videogames?
Because my environment was getting more involved with this form of entertainment. I think it has been a natural process; videogames were integrated into a family life. You'd play videogames as you would play with friends outside.

Which hardware do you own and what are you looking forward to?
I only have a PS2. I bought most of the hardware released since Famicom. I had Famicom DD, Super Famicom, Saturn and Dreamcast. Frankly, now, I'd really like to buy a GameCube. And another thing: I wouldn't buy an Xbox.

How much do you spend on videogames every month?
It's hard to say. I mean, I'm working in the game industry, but I'd say around ¥6,000 (£31). When I was a kid or a student, I used to buy much more, like many people in Japan. My little brothers and I were combining our pocket money to get a few games. So we were able to buy more than two titles each month. Plus, it was the golden age for game centres and we were spending a lot of time in the arcade. It was a time when we spent a lot on videogames.

How much time do you spend on videogames?
I'm very involved in *Winning Eleven*. I'm spending so much time on it. I spend around two to three hours every day on this title. That's over 20 hours a week. Students have more time, so they can spend and play more. As someone who works, it depends very much on the game. Take *Dragon Quest IV*, for example. People would easily spend two to three hours on it after work and much more during the weekend – around six hours a day.

Do you still play retrogames?
Not much. I'm not that involved. If I had more time to play, I'd spend it on more recent titles. I really see videogames as a form of entertainment, nothing more. I think retrogames are about collecting now. People who buy such games are collectors. They don't buy these games to play them, but to build a collection.

Compared to the golden age of the Super Famicom, how would you describe the current videogame industry?
I think Famicom was a special time when everything was new. Each time we were astonished by what was possible and what could be done on a home TV set. In the current videogame world, makers are trying to find enjoyable ways to deliver videogames in already existing game genres. On Famicom, everything had to be invented because nothing was established. Designers were exploring different avenues and many innovative titles were developed as a result. It was a lot of fun.

What is the problem with the current game industry?
I think many are too focused on the visual side of things, which requires higher and higher development budgets, and this raises the price of games. In addition, designers are thinking more about profitability in terms of their game projects and marketing. This isn't positive at all. But sometimes you have some very strange but refreshing titles like *PaRappa the Rapper*.

Do many Japanese gamers buy merchandise?
During a game event, you see people buying goods but they're mostly otakus. You also have others who don't play games but are very attracted by a given character, like SCEI's Toro. So you find these two different profiles. Take the case of the *Pikmin* music single. People bought it in large numbers, but they haven't got the game. They bought it because they found the music intriguing, cute and fun. Or they wanted to sing it perfectly in karaoke.

Are videogames accepted socially in Japan?
I believe they're integrated in our everyday life, but I still feel some people think that videogames are for kids or otakus. In another way, however, the Japanese are proud of videogames in the same way the Americans are proud of their movie industry. When you consider animation or videogames, Japan is the leader. We still witness in the media a very old and outdated way of speaking about videogames. For example, when you have a youth committing a crime, the media might say it was because of certain kinds of videogames. It's clearly written by people who have no understanding of videogames. I think this is stupid, but then you realise that society is still looking at the games like that.

But while videogames are indeed included as a way of entertainment, they're not considered a culture, like music or movies. For the moment, videogames are a sub-culture. It took a century for movies to become a culture, and videogames really only started with the Famicom, less than 20 years ago. However, I don't think it's a final objective for videogames to become accepted by society. I think its more important that videogames offer more enjoyment. That way, more users will enter the market and more money will be invested. The current market situation isn't very good. It's not profitable at all. So we have to rethink the market, in order to make it fun, profitable and regain the hearts of tired people who have left videogames.

How do your friends or relatives view your passion?
Of course, if you spend eight hours straight on videogames, parents start to wonder what you're doing! But now people aren't seeing you as an otaku. Of course, they still think it's more sensible spending ten hours watching a DVD than playing a videogame. It's another example of how gameplaying isn't totally accepted by people. Movies are presented as a part of culture. Even if you're spending the same ten hours in the same place, people's perceptions about you will be different according to how you spend that ten hours. In the case of videogames, you'd have a negative image as someone who prefers to be in a dark place, at home alone, instead of playing or enjoying something outside.

Do the Japanese prefer to play games socially or alone?
It depends on the game you play. In the case of *Winning Eleven*, I prefer to share it with others. Games are a great way to enjoy your free time, and it's actually a cheap way to enjoy your free time. But *Dragon Quest* is a kind of game you'd play alone and certainly spend many hours on it.

Do the Japanese have any interest in overseas games?
Not at all. Like others, I really believe that Japanese games are the best. Most of the import games aren't very good. Some are, but most aren't. Some are too difficult or excessive in their content. Character design isn't suitable either, making it hard to like the main character. Also gameplay isn't very precise. The same goes for controls.

What's great about Japanese games I like? Mmm... the stories are better, more polished, with more details in the event sequences and CG movies. The gameplay is also much more slick and technically accomplished. If you consider games like *Nobunaga*, *Sangokushi* or even *Winning Eleven*, they're very detailed, complete in their own content. Take the case of *MGS2*. It's offering a great scenario and realistic human animation. *Dragon Quest* is another example where the scenario is delivering its full potential. The game transmits to players emotions and has made many players cry at the end.

Do you know any overseas developers?
That's a difficult question. I would say Eidos, EA, Infogrames. But most Japanese gamers wouldn't be able to tell you a single one. In Japan, people don't buy games because of the brand; they don't even buy because of a specific producer name.



Mr Kazuhiro Watanabe,
editor of 'Hyper PlayStation 2' and 'Digimon Station'



What do you think about the current Japanese situation with so many companies in trouble?
Yes, many strong names are in a desperate situation now. The 'Final Fantasy' movie has been a deadly blow for Square, but the company has still enough creative resources and talent to get back. But as with the movie industry, the Japanese game industry is converging. Publishers will get stronger and developers weaker. In another way, if you consider the public support during Nintendo's gameshows or Miyamoto-san's speeches, you feel that there is still a lot of support and excitement for videogames. So I believe that the people who left videogames are still willing to come back, but to do so we need more enjoyable content.

Will the Japanese buy the Xbox?
Many think that PS2 is sufficient. We're at a time where the economy isn't performing as before. So there are people who think there's no need for new hardware. You have this big black heavy box with an unclear design and most people won't buy it. I think core users will. If Microsoft isn't able to offer the needed killer content, then it will suffer the same fate as 3DO. I don't think it will pass a million units in Japan. Of course, Xbox offers great graphics and sound, but also some new tastes and gameplay. I have a lot of interest in the console, but the cost is too high. Still, Microsoft has announced it will target core users in Japan. I really hope they will achieve that objective. Personally, I think Xbox will have a positive effect on the Japanese market. It should be refreshing.





The seiyuu (voice acting) industry is a growing part of Japanese gaming culture. The *Sakura Wars* cast (below) get mobbed like pop stars and can command great salaries. Often fans will act out and sing scenes as the players are performing on stage. European and American game fans are unlikely to get as excited over the prospect of a *Baldur's Gate* roadshow







Japanese way of life

Although videogaming in Japan is part of the social fabric, there's still a presiding view among the establishment that videogames are trivial, even harmful. In a society weaned on technology and television, there's a common concern about health. Indeed, many Japanese parents prefer their children to participate in more active pursuits. Often, if a child plays a game for two hours, his parents may demand that they spend an equal amount of time engaged in a more 'healthy' activity. Japanese parents are still disturbed by the thought that their child might prefer to communicate with a machine instead of a real friend, and become isolated inside their own virtual world, cut off from reality. Of course, the same concerns were expressed about the effect of TV animation on teenagers, but at least these programmes were broadcast at specific times. With videogames, parents worry that there is no limit to the time their child can spend effectively interacting with a machine. As in other countries, restrictions are often placed on gameplaying sessions – but only in Japan are such measures strictly enforced.

Crossover appeal

Despite their concerns, the videogame is encroaching on all kinds of related media, taking its valid place in society, working in synergy with other industries. Within the entertainment fields, for instance, the inherent heavy crossover of manga and anime brings a huge 'seiyuu' (voice actor) fan culture to the Japanese gaming experience. "Voice actors are more specialised here," points out MacPhee. While Disney or Pixar largely call on famous Hollywood actors to voice their characters, Japanese voice actors usually become famous in tandem with the rising popularity of their anime characters. Some sing the feature's opening or closing songs, narrate for other kinds of TV shows, and even have their own radio programmes. Promoted as idols, many record albums, go on tour and often grace the pages of voice actor magazines. As interactive entertainment became more sophisticated, branching into games was simply a matter of time.

"Many fans of certain voice actors buy games just because their favourite actors play parts in them," says Dolph. "It's just like movie fans going to movies just to see their favourite actors, regardless of the genre or quality of the movie." In the Japanese version of *Metal Gear Solid*, for example, Snake is played by Akio Otsuka, who has voiced well-known anime characters such as Osamu 'Astro Boy' Tezuka's maverick surgeon, Black Jack. New to the cast of *Metal Gear Solid 2* are Inoue Kikuko (most well known in the west as Belldandy from Oh! My Goddess) and the currently hot Maria Yamamoto (Amazing Nurse Nanako).

Fan reception is incredibly enthusiastic. Consider Sega's popular *Sakura Wars*: at promotional events and concerts, the crowd goes wild when the cast, led by Chisa Yokoyama (who plays Sakura), takes to the stage. Appearing in character, the voice artists also go through several costume changes for the various songs. During which the audience are on their feet, singing along and mimicking the performers' choreographed movements perfectly. Dwarfing onlookers at a typically packed TGS stage show, some events are of theatre or even stadium-sized proportions; the atmosphere is electric.



There's still a presiding view among the establishment that videogames are trivial, even harmful. There's a common concern about health

Bizarre creations

Japanese developers are noted for their esoteric creations, but many titles never make the transition to the west. Here is a just a selection of some of the strangest

Segagaga Sega (DC)

Just when the fortunes of the Dreamcast were ailing, Sega brought out *Segagaga*. The quest? Defeat a rival game company called Dogma by making shrewd business decisions to increase stock and spread the Sega brand worldwide. A bit of wishful thinking or inspired prescience?

Jet de Go! 2 Taito (PS2)

Many Japanese gamers adore the minutiae of simulations such as *Jet de Go! 2*. From take-off to landing, pilots must control domestic flights from one Japanese city to another. The objective is to give passengers a very smooth journey. One for the Colin Hunts of the world.

Ore no Ryori SCEI (PSone)



'Ready Steady Cook' in videogame form. Take a number of ingredients and follow the on-screen instructions to bake cakes and prepare Japanese feasts. Such titles are never likely to take off in the west, although the absence of Ainsley Harriott can only be a plus point.

Roommania #203 Sega (PS2)



The Japanese refer to the *Roommania* games as 'ghost simulations'. The idea is to manipulate the main character by moving around objects in his environment. A more complex version of this idea is soon to be announced by Empire in the form of *Ghost Master*.

As Sakura, Yokoyama has also modelled at a bridal wedding show in gowns by a famous designers (fans who missed the event can buy the photo book). Due to arrive on Dreamcast is the hotly anticipated 'Sakura Wars' movie, animated at studio Production IG ('Ghost in the Shell', 'Blood: the Last Vampire'). Two anime video series are already on sale, while the TV series finished broadcasting in 2000.

A nation's pride

Such devotion among videogame fans is hardly surprising. The best hardware, the best software – Japan is without doubt at the centre of the videogame sphere. Its roots are so strong that many (even outside Japan) have forgotten Atari and the other American pioneers which perished in the first industry crash. It's a testament to Japanese working practice that the western arm of the videogame industry still views Japan as an impenetrable citadel. No occidental hardware or software has succeeded since the Famicom initiated the second era of videogame history. Ask the people in the street – from Tokyo's eastern side of Akihabara to the western side of Shinjuku – and few could name a single western developer. Indeed, many non-Japanese publishers and developers feel the Japanese are too proud of their industry, protecting it against outsiders. "Some [Japanese] would never dare to support a platform which is not theirs and many would never buy a foreign title because they don't want to recognise a westerner's talent," points out Kagotani-san.

It is true that the Japanese are very proud of their animation and videogame industries. With so many games released each year, and with such a rich background of anime and manga to draw upon, the Japanese don't see the necessity to look elsewhere. While American and UK gamers wait with anticipation for the next release by Hideo Kojima, Yu Suzuki or Masaya Matsuura, the Japanese care little for the creations of Warren Spector or Sid Meier. Though there is an import scene in Japan, it's tiny by comparison to the west's obsession with all things Japanese. A minority of foreign games, including award-winning titles, such as *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* and *Perfect Dark*, have been released in Japan after localisation, but they don't sell in large numbers. And the Japanese give little credence to the developer's name anyway – they're completely focused on the game itself and care less about the technology behind the design.

> The best hardware, the best software – Japan is without doubt at the centre of the videogame sphere. Many have forgotten Atari and the other pioneers

Certainly the consumer boom of the '80s encouraged the traditional fervour which meets the release of a significant software title or new hardware platform in Japan. Through the '90s, and up until the launch of PlayStation2 in March 2000, the sight of desperate shoppers thronging outside gamestores in Japan has been common. While such a phenomenon has been known in America, this is a typically Japanese trait stemming back to the Famicom days, when much kudos could be gained from being part of the first wave of owners of a notable hardware or software release. But now the phenomenon has begun to fade. It is more than an economy issue. Social commentators believe that the appearance of new forms of entertainment, mobile devices and the shrinking population – especially among the young – are contributory factors.



Seigi no Mikata | SCE (PS2)

Seigi no Mikata casts the player in the role of a superhero. Many acts of heroism must be performed and all are caught live on television. The score relates to the audiences' reaction to the feats performed. *Freedom Force* (p41) should bring a similar experience to the west.

Suzuki Bakuhatsu | Enix (PS2)

Disarming mechanisms and bombs is a feature of many titles but *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* takes this aspect to new levels. In what some Japanese refer to as the most stressful game ever created a series of incendiary devices must be disarmed under very strict time limits.

Inu no Sanpo | Sega (Arcade)

Inu no Sanpo must be one of the strangest videogame experiences ever devised. The arcade game asks players to walk a digital dog around a number of environments. Points are awarded for restraining the beast a critical moments. A pooper-scoop is sadly not included.

O Story | Enix (PS2)

Enix's game is an interactive movie using mpeg2 footage. After losing his life in a motorcycle accident the hero must try and make contact with his girlfriend. In one scene he possesses the body of another female: a plot device which results in some explicit lesbian scenes.

Eastern Sounds

From a cursory glance the Japanese music industry seems to be dominated by teenage pop idols. From the expansive hats of Ayumi Hamasaki to the lurid, colourful and 'typically Japanese' imagery of the album 'Spike' by the group Puffy, J-Pop seems to have found little footing outside Japan. Conversely, the evidence of Japan's love for jazz-funk is prominent throughout the videogame industry.

Since the invention of CD-ROM-based consoles in the mid-'90s, videogame music has taken a turn towards the orchestral scores and licensed music more commonly associated with the film industry. The luxury the CD-ROM afforded producers with techniques such as audio streaming opened up opportunities to enhance a player's videogame experience through musical soundtracks of greater complexity. Game musicians no longer had to struggle to construct suitable tunes in the programming language Assembler. If a musician could record it, a game producer could use it.

You only need to sample the soundtracks to *Ace Combat 4: Distant Thunder*, *Ferrari F355 Challenge* or *Daytona USA 2001* to note the gulf between the west's taste in videogame music compared to the east's. Granted, both Japanese and western developers have taken advantage of contemporary acts, from the notable use of dance artists such as Orbital, Leftfield and The Chemical Brothers in Psygnosis' *Wipeout* to the punk driven sounds of *Crazy Taxi*. However, the influence of the jazz-funk genre of music has had a noticeable impact on Japanese videogames – from the early days right through to *Sonic Adventure*.

Freelance percussion artist **Bashiri Johnson** has worked with many notable artists in the music industry, from Eric Clapton, Madonna and the Backstreet Boys to Maxwell and Miles Davis. He's also performed on the *Sonic Adventure* soundtrack, drawing on many styles, noticeably jazz-funk. The soundtrack was produced by the Japanese-American 'Sushi' for Beat on Beat Productions.

Johnson's contribution is notable: "Playing on the *Sonic Adventure* soundtrack involved listening down to the track, sometimes with electronic percussion I had to replace, or sometimes I had to come up with a completely new, fresh and interesting percussion track."

According to Johnson, "The motivation for videogame music is to create a musical landscape that will enhance the game, graphics and effects. On an album, the music itself is the graphics, the effects and the end product. Therefore, when I play on a videogame soundtrack I'm trying to sonically and rhythmically add my percussive expertise to the player's multi-sensory game experience."

For many producers, jazz-funk is the perfect vehicle to achieve this "multi-sensory game experience." Johnson says, "I think jazz-funk is popular in Japan because it requires a lot of technique, flawless execution and creative daring. Jazz, funk and fusion music seems to always have been big in Japanese culture."

Indeed, before *Sonic Adventure*, jazz, funk and fusion influences were notable on the PC Engine – one of the first videogame systems to host a CD-ROM. Tomoyuki Hamada, president of T's Music, the company responsible for the soundtracks for *Winds of Thunder*, *Final Fight CD* and *Sentimental Graffiti* cites jazz-fusion pioneer **Bob James** as one of his major influences.

James's involvement with the Japanese music scene is far from fleeting, having guested on the album 'Soundgraphy' from 'jap-jazz' group Cassiopeia, a melting pot of east and west jazz ideas. This ties in with Johnson's belief that the *Sonic Adventure* soundtrack is "a meeting and melding of musical style and culture, and an east meets west creative celebration in game music."

He says, " I hope that the *Sonic* soundtrack will inspire other producers, writers and game companies to use live music and live musicians more." From the impact and originality of the *Sonic Adventure* soundtrack, it's hard to disagree with him. Check out www.Bashirijohnson.com for more details.

	What are the differences that make Japanese games special?	Do you think Japanese gamers crave more variety than gamers in the west?	Japanese games seem to be less violent than those developed in the west. Why is this?	What is the most amazing response you have had from a Japanese game fan?	In all honesty, do you think Japanese games are better than those developed in the west?
Tetsuya Mizuguchi (president and CEO, United Game Artists)	I have never really thought like this. But, I think there maybe a lot of creators who possess the sense to make something very deep, very polished. They really design everything for the ultimate objective: to make users enjoy their gaming experience.	Yes, I think so, but compared to before, they are not willing to experience new things, to go on an adventure. I believe there is a common will for novelty but their behaviour is very conservative.	I have the feeling that developers are thinking about morals more. Why? I say this because the same creators are now becoming father or mother, in a single word parents. I think this trend will develop further in the coming years. In my position, I have the same concern regarding my two sons: will I let them play this game?	I have these cool emails like, "Thanks for having made this game," or "Thanks for being born." As a creator it is the greatest support you could get. This gives me more strength to work.	I don't know who believes that. However, the creator and game maker population is maybe the most important in the world. I think it is impossible to compare the level of creation.
Toshihiro Nagoshi (president, Amusement Vision)	The very polished development process. Game interface, graphics, programming, all are focused on the project theme. People are pushing these elements to a very high level of quality. I think the Japanese brand is something which gives a lot of attention to both volume and quality. Conversely, overseas developers are superior in introducing new ideas and the dynamic of the development process.	I believe that currently makers are developing only in classic genres so players have no other choice than play these classic styled games. There is never much chance to hear directly from users but I think they want new experiences and more variety.	I guess there is an automatic limitation. This can be seen at the producer level. He will give the direction to the development process and its content. I don't think it is an issue for the company but for the producer.	I received a long complaint from a user. He was very angry at me because I developed a game, very similar to one of his ideas. I made the game first and he did not have the time to present it to anyone.	I think that Japanese games are, in their final form, superior to any other productions. I guess because there are many 'craftsman' creators. But, if you consider the Japanese regarding challenging abilities and development, I think we are average.
Hiroaki Yotoriyama (*Soul Calibur 2* producer, Namco)	I think the total balance is good. I mean not only the graphics but the combination of many factors like sound, game design, etc. Many games offer all these factors at a superior level with a good total balance. Plus I think that the business side is very mature. I mean, in Japan the industry is very developed.	I think users in Japan buy games with an assurance that they will get what they are looking for: excitement, surprise and emotion. Games are not cheap. Before the game is released there are many detailed previews and ads so people know in detail what they are intending to buy. However, even though there is new stuff, they want to feel safe, so many users are sticking to very well-known series and their sequels. But the industry is also very skilled in making new concepts and ideas appealing to users so they can feel safe in their purchase.	There are no real set rules – all the developers are making their own. I think that the representation of blood, real or false, will make the difference between makers.	There are too many of them (laugh). Well, I try to keep hearing from users what their opinions are.	Japanese games are at quite a high level. However, this idea would change according to each user. We would need to make a study of all these users to be sure. So, it is hard to tell. Personally, I think there is great thing in Japanese games, as well as in the overseas production. Japanese games are the best? Mmm... hard to tell.
Katsuhiro Harada (*Tekken* series designer, Namco)	I think one of the most important aspect is that Japanese games try to target a very wide audience, not a limited group of users. Because Japanese games are targeting such a wide audience, their gameplay and interfaces are made accordingly. That's why I think they are seen as great games across the world.	I think that gamers want detailed gameplay and variety. This profile can be found in every country. This is not limited to Japan. I think also there is this trend in which games are made to adapt to a given target (hardcore gamers, light users, etc). That explains why there is such a variety in the Japanese videogames industry. But, I see new trends. More than variety, more than content, the lifestyle is changing. I mean games you can play whenever you want and how long you want to. For example, you could play a short time as well as a long time. We are witnessing a new type of game adapted to the new life style developed by all users' profiles.	There is not such a clear system like in America (ESRB). So each maker has to define it own moral code. In the *Tekken* series, we are deciding this issue ourselves and frankly quite seriously, very tightly. For example, we would not include sequences where parts of the body would project very bloody visuals. In the same way, we decided to not show tobacco or alcohol on screen. Plus we try to not use insulting words or those with a very negative (disturbing) meaning. For example, in the US, when sexual harassment was in the news, we decided to change an ending in *Tekken 3*. Look at the Japanese version and you would understand.	The biggest surprise was certainly a retired WW2 soldier (grandpa) who sent us a postcard with these comments regarding the *Tekken* series: "According to my own experience, it is impossible that bodies can be projected in the air like this." We were all astonished. Another one? There was another gamer who wanted to fight as a penguin. Well, these requests were quite far from our idea of the *Tekken* series and we had a hard time even thinking about making this possible.	I think that Japan, a few years ago, for given genres, was the leader worldwide. I still think that for interface, access time, game response, adaptation to the hardware specifications, etc... well Japanese games are quite advanced compared to overseas productions. But personally, I don't think Japan is the supreme leader of the industry. I think that overseas the PC game industry is the pioneer in many ways. *Unreal*, *Quake*, *Half-Life*, the kind of game we call '*Doom*-like' in Japan. Overseas, we witness new trends in online games starting with *Diablo 2*, then *Ultima Online*, *EverQuest*, *Anarchy Online*, etc. I think overseas developers are the pioneers of the online gaming industry. I'm a big fan. South Korean makers are very dynamic, too, and European productions are very appealing. The time when a videogame equalled 'Made in Japan' is over.
Tomonobu Itagaki (head of Team Ninja, Tecmo)	I would answer with one single word: 'gentle'. Meaning: made with a lot of care, a lot of attention.	I don't think there is much difference between Japanese and foreign users. Fighting, driving, shooting – in the major genres, user profiles look the same. I believe there are a few differences but they are addressed as we localise the game. I think *DOA3* is a good example.	In the US, there is the ESRB. In Japan the CESA is handling the issue. Both are more or less strict. Makers are not troubled anyway. But this issue is not set only with words. I mean morals are important. So you have to take into consideration the age of the users you are targeting.	I remember a letter from a martial arts master. He asked me to include in my next game his martial art and would provide me with all the necessary help.	Yes, for the moment, but I don't think this will last long (laugh).









Financial analysts believe that the mobile phone is the biggest danger to videogames and other forms of entertainment. Although some Japanese developers tried mobile phone gaming as a solution, the revenue yield has been poor. Population monitoring has also highlighted the rising number of single-child families in Japan over recent years, which was an uncommon situation just two decades before. Now there are worries that the population of children is insufficient to support the current size of the Japanese game industry.

Some Japanese commentators believe that the ageing industry itself is partly to blame. People are growing tired of game concepts which haven't fundamentally evolved since Nintendo's reign with the Famicom. Ironically, Sony's decision to build in DVD playback to the PlayStation2 (DVD sales were relatively low before the PS2 release) could also be having an adverse effect. Evidence suggests that Japanese PlayStation2 users are now buying more DVDs than videogames.

box during 2000. Although Sega's dream has diminished, the general will is still there: videogames will be part of a central hub in the Japanese home by 2005.

And within only the last few years, the east/west divide has shown signs of weakening. Fans dressed as Gundam, Sailor Moon or Pokémon are now commonplace at anime conventions across America. Often attending are English voice actors of the anime dubs, who rub shoulders with their Japanese counterparts, enjoying similar fan attention. Terms like 'mecha' and 'super deformed' have become part of the gaming lexicon, the former even used to describe the robots in Steven Spielberg's AI. In terms of trends, there's no denying that the rise of certain Japanese game genres, which were considered too eccentric before, are being greenlighted for both US and UK release.

"Anime and manga fans overseas would probably enjoy games such as *Tokimeki Memorial*," says Dolph. "Its very Japanese style, which most Japanese children grow up with, is a part of Japanese culture and not only for the otaku." Nevertheless, the numbers still can't warrant an English localisation at this stage. Likewise, MacPhee believes that cosplay is unlikely to reach the same level of popularity outside of Japan. But who knows? Well known manga artists and anime directors have already relocated to America to make their mark and the artform continues to penetrate mainstream consciousness.

With the success of 'The Matrix' and 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon', the convergence of eastern and western entertainment culture is in its infancy. Whether the total Japanese gaming experience (and the spending habits involved) will follow suit remains to be seen. But if karaoke can cross the divide, anything's possible.

The games industry, in terms of social standing, stands shoulder to shoulder with the TV industry, computer services and the DVD trade

Reasons to be cheerful

But there are reasons to be cheerful. Videogames are slowly coming to represent an important part of the Japanese way of life. Although sales have been down recently, the game industry, in terms of social standing, stands shoulder to shoulder with the TV industry, computer services (mainly email use) and the DVD trade. Game ads are common, with TV news and newspapers covering all the major game or hardware announcements. And in its will to establish a broadband society, the government is pushing the major players, including game developers, to bring the entire nation together. Even the Dreamcast was seen as the best candidate for a set-up box during 2000.

Cosplay and cuteness

One of Akihabara's most comprehensive videogame stores, Gamers, also has its own mascot, Di Gi Charat. Look at the top of the building and her smiling face beams across Akihabara. "She's like a cute and comical virtual sister," owner Gaku Kawaguchi explains. Her CDs are big sellers ("Because fans can hear her voice singing out."), followed by the anime film and the Dreamcast game. The franchise also holds events like a nationwide championship for their Di Gi Charat trading card game, as well as voice actors turning up for in-store appearances. Of the latter he comments, "They're popular because fans can feel closer and interact with them, compared to TV or movie actors." Such appearances usually conclude with the actors happily shaking hands with a long line of admirers.

When asked about the appeal of cute characters like Di Gi Charat and Sony's cat Toro (who has become rather popular of late), Kawaguchi-san's take is that people are tired in their everyday lives and seek some kind of comfort. Similarly, cosplay offers an avenue of escape and excitement which would be too easy to dismiss as a purely otaku pastime. It's the Japanese equivalent of Trekkers or 'Star Wars' fans donning costumes and make-up for events and movie premieres. Some enthusiasts meet online, form groups pertaining to an anime or game and meet at the Tokyo Game Show or the comic book festival, Comiket. The Japanese are passionate about such events, often planning up to a year in advance or arranging as many as four events per month, some of which take the form of dance parties.

"They can enjoy [cosplaying] with friends and enter the competitions to see who has the best costume from their favourite series," MacPhee explains. He observes that the pressure of conforming in Japanese society may be one of the reasons for its popularity – some fans even painstakingly create costumes of their favourite robot characters. Coming across like an anime and gaming Mardi Gras, the event in turn draws hordes of photographers. Mostly amateurs, despite the sophisticated equipment, some enjoy it as a form of communication, sending a copy of the prints back to the cosplayer later.


Rising

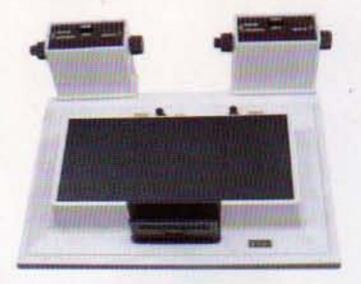


Sun

How Japan stole the videogame industry

The videogame was born in the US, but its fathers are ghosts now. Atari, Coleco, Fairchild, Williams Electronics, Magnavox – most are gone forever, or merely linger as hollow brands. While the Atari symbol may have become the Nike Swoosh of consumer electronics, part of its cool lies in the fact that it symbolises something which has passed. It's retro chic – more Nike Cortez than Nike Air Jump.

Regular Edge readers will know the significance of the Magnavox Odyssey: in 1972 it effectively launched home videogaming in America. However, just 15 years later,and after the fall of Atari, Japanese companies dominated the industry











US

Coleco, Mattel Electronics, Williams, Parker Brothers and Atari. They were once big-hitters in the videogame world, but now they exist merely as hollow brands. None truly recovered from the crash of the early '80s

But the Japanese companies around in the '70s – Namco, Taito, Sega, Nintendo – they're still here. What's more, they not only survived the crash of 1983, they now dominate the industry. America still has a massive presence of course, but it reports to Japanese masters, developing games for Japanese consoles. Xbox? It'll struggle unless Japanese developers put faith in it.

How did this happen? How did America let the videogame hardware market slip through its fingers, and what qualities allowed its eastern rival to pick up the pieces? To answer that, you have to go back, further than the beginning of the consumer electronics industry, back to the birth of modern Japan.

Dawn of the dragon

On August 6 1945, a B-29 bomber nicknamed Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb on the coastal town of Hiroshima. In some ways, this was 'merely' the exclamation mark on America's sustained bombing campaign of key Japanese cities throughout World War 2 (a raid on Tokyo in the preceeding March involved 300 planes and destroyed 39 square kilometres of the city). However, the terrible human cost of Hiroshima, and of Nagasaki three days later, forced the Japanese military into surrender. By the end of the war Japan was left with ten million unemployed and a quarter of its national wealth lost. The country also found itself occupied by a foreign power for the first time in its history.

And this could have been the end of the story. Due to the surprise bombing of Pearl Harbour in '41 and the atrocious treatment of British and American POWs by Japanese forces during the war, the country was widely detested. In 1944, a US opinion poll found that one in three American citizens thought that Japan should cease to exist as a county while, incredibly, one in eight felt that all the Japanese should be killed.

The American government felt differently. Troubled by the rise of communism in Russia and the unpredictable might of China, the US needed a strong ally in the east. Instead of destroying Japan, it wanted to re-invent the country as a modern capitalist force. And so, during the '50s, America oversaw the economic rebuilding of Nippon, providing financial advice, buying millions of dollars of Japanese equipment for the Korean war and, vitally for this story, making many of its own technological advances available to Japanese companies – technologies such as the transistor and later the integrated circuit. Foundation components of the consumer electronics industry.

Western technology, Japanese methods – perhaps America hoped to control this burgeoning economic power, to keep it











The Atari 2600 was phenomenally successful in its day hosting titles like *Berzerk*, *Pitfall* and *Yars' Revenge*. But its lifespan was extended for too long with below-par games

ticking along modestly. This was not to be. The singularly diligent and meticulous Japanese workforce adapted brilliantly to working in the new electronics arena, continually driving miniaturisation and refining manufacturing processes for cost-effectiveness.

As a result, Japanese companies began to dominate key areas such as television manufacture, exporting millions of sets to the US and placing the less efficient American consumer electronics industry in jeopardy. By the end of the '60s Japan so dominated the industry that Richard Nixon asked for the Japanese government to place restraints on the amount of TVs exported into America. Ironically, to get around this, Japanese companies simply began to invest in the US, opening up their own factories across America. By 1990 only one US-owned television manufacturer remained.

"By the end of the '60s Japan so dominated the industry that Richard Nixon asked the Japanese government to place restraints on the amount of TVs exported into America"

Japan was also able to appreciate the commercial opportunities represented by new technologies. In 1972, for example, a small American company named Cartridge Television Inc launched the first home VCR but was unable to meet the manufacturing and marketing costs alone. No big US electronics companies had either the foresight or manufacturing capabilities to realise the potential of the product so in stepped Sony and JVC who developed smaller and cheaper versions of the home VCR technology. By 1987, 100 million VCRs had been sold across the world: 95 per cent of them were made in Japan. The same thing happened with the fax machine and the flat screen display – both invented in the US, but refined and mass-produced in Japan.

The videogame industry of the '70s and early '80s was just another example of this economic relationship between the two countries. American companies Atari and Magnavox invented the videogame console, but the concept was copied and vastly improved by Nintendo via the Famicom. It also happened with software – the fantasy role playing game, for example, was an American invention, yet Japanese developers Enix and Square turned the RPG videogame into the biggest genre in the world. However, the early arcade years also put pay to the belief that Japan could only copy – titans such as *Pac-Man*, *Frogger* and *Space Invaders* were purely Japanese concepts.

Ultimately, the need to exploit Japan as a lucrative eastern market, coupled with a







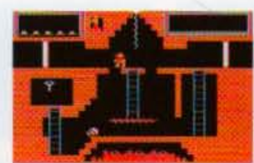


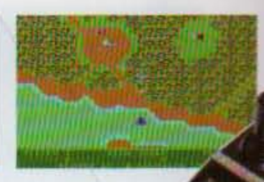




Japan

Taito, Capcom, Hudson, Sega and Konami: Japanese software and hardware manufacturers who rose to prominence when American companies floundered. Their enduring presence is testament to Japanese ingenuity

In 1982 Atari's 5200 SuperSystem was the successor to the 2600. But games like *Montezuma's Revenge*, *Centipede*, *Q*Bert* and *Xevious* were no match for those about to launch on Nintendo's Famicom. The flimsy controller hardly helped matters





A number of videogame disasters, such as *ET*, *Pac-Man* and *Custer's Revenge* (above) underlined the dearth of original releases coming out of America. Predictably, by 1983 the US videogame industry was imploding

propensity to misunderstand and underestimate the country characterised America's business relationship with its new ally for most of the post-war era. Pity no one told Nolan Bushnell.

Interlude: Atari versus Japan

Atari had two key chances to make life-saving deals with Japanese videogame corporations. It blew them both. The first was with Namco way back in 1973 and an excellent account is given by **Steven L Kent** in his book 'The First Quarter'. Apparently, Atari's Japan office was floundering, unable to break into the country's closed market, so Namco president Masaya Nakamura bought the operation and began to officially distribute *Pong*. Three years later, Atari sent over the first *Breakout* machines and Nakamura-san, realising he had a smash hit on his hands, flew over to meet Nolan Bushnell and request as many units as possible (his deal with Atari allowed him to distribute the games *not* manufacture them). Unfortunately, Bushnell had been attending the boozy Music Operators Association convention the night before and, hungover, was in no real mood to talk business. Infuriated, Nakamura-san flew back to Japan and started to manufacture his own version of *Breakout* – which flooded the market. Namco subsequently became one of the biggest videogame companies in Asia.

Later in 1983 Nintendo approached Atari to become the distributor of its NES console in the States and Europe. Atari chairman Ray Kassar dithered over the deal but when a group of Atari managers flew over to Japan to see the machine it seemed an agreement would be likely. In the background however, Atari was already falling apart and instead of quickly sealing the life-saving multi-million dollar deal, bickering over the finer points continued – especially when Atari saw Coleco exhibiting a version of *Donkey Kong* for its Adam home computer at the CES – Atari was supposed to have the exclusive console rights. Even when that issue was straightened out, the deal fizzled away. According to David Sheff in his book 'Game Over', Atari was just stringing Nintendo along, trying to keep a competitor out of the market and at the same time sneakily learning about their technology. An ignoble end to Bushnell's original dream.

In December 1982, the American videogame industry began to fall apart. The collapse was so sudden, game design consultant **Ernest Adams** can characterise it in three sentences, "Atari announced lower-than-expected earnings only days before their arch-rival, Imagic, was due to go public. In the bubble market, Atari's stock crashed and the Imagic IPO never took place. Mattel decided to give up on the Intellivision to concentrate on its real strengths, and as a result the field was clear for the Japanese." And that was that. Stock market panic, as much as public indifference killed the videogame industry – just as it popped the dot.com bubble in 1999.

But why didn't the same thing happen to the likes of Namco and Nintendo? There's a simple answer. Generally, Japanese companies aim for stable long-term growth rather than explosive short-term gain, so they don't make stupid Atari-style decisions such as manufacturing 12 million *Pac-Man* VCS carts to cash in on the success of the coin-op

"Japanese companies aim for stable long-term growth rather than explosive short-term gain, so they don't make stupid Atari-style decisions such as manufacturing 12 million Pac-Man VCS carts"











At the other side of the globe Japanese developers were harnessing the power of the versatile Famicom hardware. A sceptical US industry felt that the renamed Nintendo Entertainment System would flop. But with titles like *Metroid*, *Super Mario Bros.* and *Mega Man* the NES became *the* industry standard in the '80s

(there were only ten million VCS units in existence at the time). Financial caution begins on an individual level: the average Japanese household saves 16 per cent of its income compared to 5 per cent in the US and 9 per cent in Britain. Saving is virtuous. For the young, it's virtually a fashion statement.

Forward planning

What this creates is a culture of planning ahead, and of allowing products time to find an audience. *Space Invaders* was a failure for months in Japan before sales started picking up and the game went interstellar. On the flipside, Sega stuck with console development long enough to bankrupt pretty much any western manufacturer. But when that failed, the company didn't collapse – it simply formulated a new five-year plan, based on software development and online gaming. "Another interesting example of long-term planning is that the president of Nintendo recently sold his shares in his company and set up a $20 million fund for game developers," says **Bruce Rutledge** of Tokyo-based 'Japan Inc' magazine. "Of course, he did this, in part, to cut his taxes, but the move is also likely to pull in some creative talent in Nintendo's battle to catch up to PlayStation."

Japanese companies are also less susceptible to the unpredictable machinations of the stock market, because most financial backing comes, not from over-excitable shareholders, but from the country's ultra rich banks. Recently, however, this system has come back to haunt the country, as the very

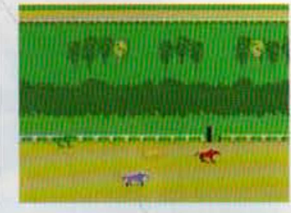
Japanese companies are less susceptible to the unpredictable machinations of the stock market, because backing comes, not from over-excitable shareholders, but from the ultra rich banks"

same banks have loaned billions to companies and are currently getting nothing back, which is inhibiting economic growth and feeding the recession. But for a long while it meant companies could announce lower than expected profits and not have to worry about shareholders panicking, selling out in their droves and causing a crash. In Japan, shareholders just aren't that important.

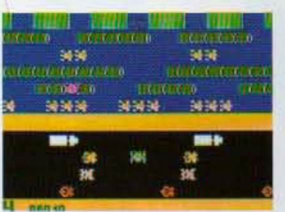
Quality versus Quantity

One of the most obvious reasons for Japan's domination of consumer electronics in the '60s, as well as the ship and car building industries, is that its products were more reliable and lasted longer than those











Mattel's Intellivision enjoyed some success with games as diverse as (clockwise from top left) *Lock and Chase*, *Horse Racing*, *Astrosmash* and *Frogger*. But it would be eclipsed by the NES



Eastern promise
Eight factors which separate Japan from the rest of the world

1. Japan has a population of 126 million, but less land space than many American states. Consequently, there's an instinctive drive to miniaturise here that just doesn't exist in America, the third largest country on the planet. And miniaturisation is a vital element in driving sales of new consumer electronics products. Ignore tech specs for a second: now compare 3DO to PlayStation or Xbox to Gamecube. How many casual gamers will make their console-buying decisions based on looks as much as performance? Japan makes things small and cute, two qualities we are naturally drawn to.

Overcrowding has also had a direct influence on leisure culture. Outdoor pastimes such as golf and tennis are either prohibitively expensive or have to be booked months in advance, so Japanese society as a whole has embraced the videogame as a stigma-free alternative.

2. On average, Japanese school children have the highest IQs and literacy levels in the world. Since WW2 the country has developed an intensely competitive education system where kids fight to qualify for entry into the best universities – which in turn lead to the best jobs. To keep up with their peers, three quarters of students attend 'juku' – intensive summer schools for pre-exam cramming, while private tuition during the school term is also the norm rather than the exception. All this goes to create an intelligent, hardworking and highly competitive workforce.

Discipline and obedience are also important elements of the Japanese school system – and of society in general. Capcom, Namco and co can cram hundreds of programmers in massive R&D labs without a whisper of rebellion, while artists can be assigned highly specific tasks (ie designing all the trees, or only working on building textures) without constant demands for greater artistic freedom.

3. Japanese workers put in 10–15 per cent more hours per year than their western rivals. The classic 'salaryman' stereotype may be tinged with xenophobia, but generally, it's the norm to put in long hours and socialise more with co-workers than anyone else. The fraught videogame development cycle demands this kind of selfless dedication – a AAA 128bit title will not be finished in the required 18 months without it.

4. The Japanese talent for endlessly refining and improving core products has shaped the country's software as well as hardware output. As Chris Charla argues, "To some extent, Japanese developers find what works and stick with it, adding endless refinements until the genre is done to death (*Survival Horror 19X: Alpha Side Story Revolution Plus Plus*), while western developers constantly change what they're doing, sometimes without ever finding anything that works at all."

5. Necessity is the mother of invention. Long working hours mean that Japanese workers of both genders and all ages are forced to compact their leisure time into bite-sized chunks. Japanese videogames have evolved to meet the leisure needs of this diverse audience. During a half-hour visit to an arcade, you can dance, ride a horse, drive a Ferrari F355 and pilot the 7am JR commuter train into Tokyo main station.

6. Japanese culture is incredibly receptive to new ideas and influences. It welcomes, rather than fears, advancing technology. As Bruce Rutledge points out, "There are several robotics specialists who admit to being inspired by *Astroboy* when they were young. Their vision of robots is very different from the western vision of HAL in '2001: A Space Odyssey'. They have no problem calling the Aibo cute or hoping to be 'friends' with a humanoid robot in the future. Technology can be warm to the Japanese. They can find it cute. Millions of dollars are being made by companies on melodies for cellphones. This embracing of technology by consumers frees companies to experiment. They are never sure what might be the next big thing."

7. Company hierarchy is incredibly stable in Japan. Promotions are handed out on the basis of loyalty and longitude of service so you don't often get young, untested firebrands pitched high up into the corporate structure. The same could not be said for the Atari of the early '80s. In 'The First Quarter', **Steve Race** former vice president of Marketing and Communications at the company is quoted as admitting, "We had 24- and 26-year-old MBAs running round making multi-million dollar decisions. I remember shortly after I first joined Atari they had just signed up to do a video rendition of Rubik's Cube."

8. The key Japanese developers work a little like '70s Hollywood. Creative decisions are made by lone auteurs, trusted to provide a unique vision. Think of Shigeru Miyamoto, Hideo Kojima or Yu Suzuki. The development staff beneath them have little say in the direction of the project, so the initial concept remains undiluted by endless product meetings and creative disputes. Chris Charla of Digital Eclipse Software adds, "While you see Japanese publishers supporting top designers with unlimited resources, in the west, it's only the developers who can fund themselves (id, Molyneux, Blizzard) who can really take as long as they need to make a game perfect."

Biohazard



Biohazard 3: Last Escape



Biohazard Code: Veronica



Devil May Cry



Though many western developers attempt wildly ambitious projects: *Daikatana*, *Severance: Blade of Darkness*, *Driver 2*, they are rarely honed to perfection. By contrast, if Japanese developers hit upon a successful formula they will often refine it over numerous iterations making sure that the controls and interface receive the most attention. *Devil May Cry* is testament to such a working ethos





Namco's president, Masaya Nakumura built his company on the back of *Breakout* and *Pac-Man*

manufactured in the west. Quality control is a central facet in the Japanese manufacturing ethos. Japanese cars, for example, regularly top the lists of the most reliable models.

Customer care

It was Nintendo that introduced QC to the videogame industry. When the Famicom launched in 1985 Yamauchi-san made his commitment to customer care immediately clear by recalling the entire first shipment when it was discovered the chipset was slightly bugged. As Kent points out in 'The First Quarter', "Though it cost Nintendo a small fortune and alerted retailers to problems with the new console, Yamauchi decided that protecting the Nintendo name was more important than preserving the initial momentum of the sales."

He also learned a valuable lesson from the American videogame crash of 1983: don't flood the market with terrible games. The early '80s saw a glut of atrocious VCS titles, which turned off the public and poisoned the market. As Ernest Adams explains, "Anyone could make and sell Atari cartridges, and so all sorts of people were jumping on the bandwagon. That's the only way an abomination like *Custer's Revenge* could have been published.



The whole industry was driven by a gold-rush mentality and that destroyed it. They seemed to think the public's appetite for videogames was unlimited. There was no quality control. There was no effort to really understand the market, nor to manage its expectations."

"It turned into a feedback loop," continues **Chris Charla** at Digital Eclipse Software. "Piles of unsold software that no one wanted versus top priced games equals no sales for top price games, equals more piles of unsold software, equals no market for game developers (although as a young kid in 1983, I was in heaven with the cheap software), equals crash.



The Family Computer was the system which kick-started the videogame industry in Japan. It is home to some of the industry's richest treasures

"Japan didn't really steal the videogame industry it just happened to have the right skills and cultural attitudes to develop for closed systems"

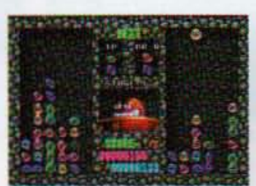
"What Nintendo did right was to institute the licensing system and to establish minimum standards of quality (along with their content rules – Nintendo didn't allow blood for many years)," continues Adams. "To make a game for the NES, you had to meet Nintendo's standards, full stop. That approval process we all chafe under is the thing that restored the videogame industry to health. It meant that shoddy, buggy, and offensive games just didn't appear for the Nintendo system." Although a cursory glance at the PSone back catalogue would suggest that not every console manufacturer is as stringent as Nintendo, Sony does keep an eye on the basic quality of the games.

Present tense

Japan didn't really steal the videogame industry, it just happened to have the right skills and cultural attitudes to develop for closed systems. And of course, there's more to videogames, than, erm, videogames. As Chris Charla asserts, "Comparing western and Japanese videogame development isn't fair, because for years (although this is now









Sega followed up on the success of its Master System with the Mega Drive. Launched in 1988 (a full two years before the SNES) it visually trounced anything the NES could produce. Titles like *Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* and *Sonic The Hedgehog* wooed American audiences, too. With games like *Super Mario Kart* and *UN Squadron* the SNES saw off any US hardware competition. Later, the 3DO would fail in Japan









A quest for lost heros

The RPG is just one example of a genre which was largely invented in America but later refined by the Japanese:

Developed by Will Crowther as a tool to help him explore his local cave system in Kentucky, *Adventure* implemented simple movement commands with the ability to pick up and use objects to overcome obstacles. Don Woods later expanded the game and it would eventually be known as *Colossal Cave Adventure*.



Colossal Cave Adventure (c1975)

Dragon Quest (1986)

Created by Akira Toriyama (artist), Koichi Sugiyama (composer) and Yuji Hori (writer) *Dragon Quest* infused the US RPG with vibrant colours and solid characterisation. Upgradable weapons, sub-quests and 'interactive' NPCs gave Japanese gamers something to, literally, cry about.

The world of Britannia was created by Richard Garriott as much for himself as anyone else. The ability to roam (almost) freely across vast maps and take on epic quests made text adventures of the day seem paltry by comparison. *Ultima Online* was the natural progression from this first seed.



Ultima (1980)



Legend of Zelda (1986)

Miyamoto-san's real innovation was turning the stodgy turn-based RPG into something far more dynamic. The result was a game which he famously said was inspired by his childhood explorations of fields and caves. Fluid swordplay and secrets under blades of grass and rocks made this a truly seminal title.

Created by Ken Arnold and Michael Toy, *Rogue* famously presented players as an '@' sign and asked them to kill capital letters. Abstract symbols aside, the game's real strength was in the generation of completely different levels for every game. It was addictive, too, proving just how diverse the genre could be.



Rogue (1980)



Final Fantasy (1987)

It was to be Hironubu Sakaguchi's last ditch attempt at making something great. *Final Fantasy* introduced a party dynamic with a sophisticated (for its day) spell system. Japanese gamers instantly took to the formula and it has gone on to become the most successful videogame RPG series ever.

With a pseudo 3D environment and statistics galore, *Wizardry* couldn't help but entice a legion of university nerds into its intricate web. It was a pretty basic dungeon-bash back in '81 but since then Sir Tech Software has produced seven sequels. Many US gamers still see the series as the best in the genre.



Wizardry (1981)



Phantasy Star (1988)

The greatest game ever created on the Master System? Undoubtedly. Yuji Naka's response (as lead programmer) to *Dragon Quest* was to make a game with even more charm. With cute characters, (remember Myau?), pseudo 3D dungeons and a ripping plot, *Phantasy Star* was *the* exemplar of RPGs.

changing) many of the best US developers worked on PC games, not videogames. Consequently, western innovation has sometimes been overlooked by people who concentrate solely on cartridges or black CDs." PC development suits the western psyche – there are no rules, no hardware manufacturers to appease, and comparatively small, subversive teams can make massive 'Blue Sky' leaps like *Doom*, *Command & Conquer* and *Operation Flashpoint*.

But lessons are being learned, with many western companies adopting Japanese standards, at least as far as console development goes – look at the huge team Codemasters has placed on *Colin McRae Rally 3*. And with Xbox, perhaps America can wrestle back a share of the console hardware market. Its built-in hard disc, Internet functionality and comparatively open architecture may appeal to the sort of coders who enjoy the creative freedom of developing for PC. In any case, developers like Charla know success is all down to the software – if that bit's working anything's possible. "In 1994, all anyone said was 'Sony knows nothing about games… this is going to be the costliest and most embarrassing failure in history… no one will buy a Sony console.' Which is basically all the shit everyone says about Xbox now. Fanboys aside, the consumer doesn't really care where he plays, he cares about what he plays."



Photography: Pete Loretz **Studio II**

Adapt and excel

Six Japanese companies that re-shaped the videogame industry:

Namco

Formed: 1955

Namco originally built fairground rides for shopping malls, but in 1972 the company met Atari and became a classic example of Japanese manufacturing skill applied to American concepts (see Atari vs Japan). Its first key in-house title, *Galaxians*, was merely a refinement of the massively successful *Space Invaders*. But then out of nowhere a Namco designer named Moru Iwatani came up with the idea for *Pac-Man* – a seismic shift in videogame design and proof that Japanese developers didn't have to rely on the west for inspiration. Namco went on to revolutionise the driving game with *Pole Position*, featuring detailed colour graphics and a real-life circuit, and *Final Lap*, the first coin-op to feature multi-cabinet link-up. Throughout the '90s, the company's battle with Sega dominated the 3D arcade game market, and led to consistent advances in the fighting and driving genres.




Konami

Formed: 1969

Konami originally produced mechanical amusement machines before moving to videogames in the wake of *Space Invaders*. Through the '80s, the company boasted a diverse roster, often brilliantly refining existing genres (*Scramble* was the first shooter to offer two types of weapons, while *Yie Ar Kung Fu* was the first beat 'em up with energy bars) or coming up with whole new concepts (the legendary *Frogger*). Later, Konami highlighted the Japanese ability to condense any leisure activity into a coin-op experience with its *Beat Mania* and *Dance, Dance Revolution* titles. Ernest Adams: "The Japanese are not hamstrung by the western obsession with 'cool' – part of our unspoken assumption that all gamers are 13-year-old boys, for whom (we believe) 'cool' is the be-all and end-all. That's why the dance simulation genre had to be invented in Japan; it could never have been invented in the west because it was too uncool: no guns, no blood. The fact that it caught on here anyway just shows that a) not all our customers are 13-year-old boys and b) 13-year-old boys might not be as narrow-minded as we like to stereotype them."



Sega

Formed: 1954

Set up by American businessman David Rosen, Service Games spent the '50s and '60s importing everything from pinball machines to photobooths – often for the US soldiers stationed in Japan after WW2. In the '60s though, the company shifted to videogames and by the early '80s was already a major innovator with the excellent isometric shooter *Zaxxon*, the first laser-disc game, *Astron Belt*, and most significantly, the first 3D game *Sub-Roc 3D* (years later Sega spearheaded the modern day 3D revolution with its *Virtua* series). Like Namco and Nintendo, Sega had many business dealings with American companies throughout its early history: in 1970 the company was sold to Gulf Western which then spun off the American arm to Bally. After the videogame crash of 1983, the US companies were desperate to sell and a group of Japanese investors bought the whole shebang. Predictably, the company then went on to make millions with classics like *Outrun*, *Space Harrier* and *Shinobi*.



Nintendo

Formed: 1889

For over half a century Nintendo's sole business interest was the manufacturing of playing cards. When Hiroshi Yamauchi took over the company in 1949, however, he wanted to diversify and 20 years later set up a game department to R&D new product ideas. The first result was Gumpei Yokoi's *Ultra Hand* – a simple robotic arm device – and throughout the '70s love testing and lightgun shooting games followed. Shigeru Miyamoto joined the company in 1977 and worked on a couple of scrapped projects before converting the Beauty and the Beast fairy tale into proto-platformer *Donkey Kong* in 1981.

The company's first dealings with America were suitably inauspicious – Yamauchi-san bought the rights to distribute the Maganox system in Japan. However, the company then began to manufacture its own simple TV games based on similar technology with the Colour TV Game 6 selling a million units in 1977. Finally, Nintendo engineer Masayuki Uemura began work on the Famicom released in 1983. Half a million units flew off Japanese shelves in the first two months. In 1985, Nintendo released it in the US, re-named The Nintendo Entertainment System as the word videogame was still mud in the States. It was a massive success – by 1989 there was a NES in a third of American homes. Nintendo had sold back the videogame industry to America.



Taito

Formed: 1974

Taito spent the early '70s producing various re-hashes of *Pong* (*Elepong*) and *Breakout* (*TT Block*). However, in 1978, designer Tomohiro Nishikado set out to create a new shooting game, choosing aliens as the aggressors and allegedly basing their formation on a Japanese production line. The result, *Space Invaders*, became arguably the most important videogame ever made – a wake-up call to Atari and the rest of the US videogame industry. Although hugely successful and prolific, Taito has failed to make a similar impact since, but like Capcom, has cleverly exploited its key brands (*Space Invaders*, *Puzzle Bobble*, *Darius*, *Densha De Go*) with continuous refinements.



Capcom

Formed: 1979

Like Taito, Capcom was set-up specifically to exploit the burgeoning videogame phenomenon. The first title was a simple trackball bowling sim, but it was *1942* (released in 1984) that made the company's name, adding scrolling backgrounds and complex enemy attack waves to the standard *Space Invaders* recipe. Perhaps more than any other devco, Capcom symbolises the Japanese ability to continually refine and re-invent: the *Street Fighter* series, for example, has been through several generations, spawning countless spin-offs and side stories. However, Capcom also refutes the myth that Japanese companies have no original ideas. *Resident Evil* transformed the clumsy game mechanics of *Alone in the Dark* into tense thirdperson gaming with horror film aesthetics. Plus, *Auto Modellista* is set to give the driving game a kick-start in 2002.



Charming Charles

At school, Charles Cecil was groomed to become a captain of industry, but after an offer from a friend to write games on a ZX81 adventure emulator his destiny was forever changed. The humble *Inca Curse*, *Ship of Doom* and *Espionage Island* were snapped up by Arctic software and Charles Cecil has been writing videogames ever since. The rise to fame has been swift. Newspapers spin into view: Revolution formed in 1990; *Lure of the Temptress* – hit; *Beneath a Steel Sky* – hit; *Broken Sword* – hit; *Broken Sword II: The Smoking Mirror* – hit.

But technology has moved on, effectively leaving the point-and-click adventure behind. So, how does Revolution propose to deliver next-generation titles with sterling plots and satisfying gameplay? **Edge** talked to the man responsible for some of the industry's only examples of narrative excellence about the next chapter on story telling.



You are obviously very passionate about history and storytelling, where does this stem from?

I have a very genuine interest about what we can do with interactive narrative. I do have an interest in movies and script writing and I think that intellectually, the idea of being able to write an interactive script is just wonderful and I see us very much as the pioneers of something that's really big. I really believe that as this market grows, it's going to be the interactive narrative that really sets games apart.

But clearly many developers seem to think that telling a story is about borrowing from film and delivering long cut-scenes and FMV sequences.

These guys are so wrong to take it so literally. What you do learn from films, for instance, is that if you want a sinister shot, you have a low camera angle. The beauty of 3D is that you can put the camera where you want. In conjunction with the music guys you can create many effects, so it's not a cut-scene. That you can learn. The structure of the narrative, that you can learn. If you are just going to make a 15-minute FMV sequence then what you are doing is saying we are not going to learn from movies, we are going to copy them. Ultimately, for the massmarket, we know movies are the most compelling form of entertainment. And yet we know that videogames with their interactivity have the potential to be the most compelling. We have so much more in our armoury than these linear paths.

Yet, videogame narratives have traditionally been so poor…

I think it's because writers want to be given a broad remit and they say, "I'll write a game for you." So they go away and inevitably it doesn't work within the interactive environment. The way that we work [at Revolution] is that we originate the story in conjunction with our vision for the game. We drive the story and the vision for the game side-by-side. That is the gameplay. Very jealously we keep control of the gameplay. Within the context of that we will look for outside support, musicians, or external writers, etc.

But other developers do this and their games still emerge with hackneyed plots.

I personally love the idea of writing stories and I think I'm pretty good at it. But I absolutely acquire people outside to attack the story and work with me on the story and question the motivation and question the emotion of the characters, ie "Would you believe this?" So for *Broken Sword III* [*Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* – PS2, Xbox, PC] which is going through the design stages at the moment, our designer will say, "I don't believe that a girl who's just had her fiancé killed would react in that way." From a game perspective you want her to provide certain information. But I'm sorry, if I can't believe the plot then this information will have to change and the situation in which she finds herself will have to change.

"We know that videogames have the potential to be the most compelling form of entertainment. We have so much more in our armoury"

So, do too many developers remain too rigid with their design?

Perhaps. We go back and reverse engineer it so that she would be in a believable position. We spend a lot more time and a lot more money – definitely a lot more money – on working out every detail. But we don't change things until the story structure is solid, so the additions are constructive rather than say, "Oh God, we've got to finish the product, let's come up with a story."

Has any game impressed you recently?

Well, with *Shenmue* I was disappointed. It moved so slowly. People that I admire really like *Shenmue*, so I know that it is my problem not *Shenmue*'s problem. It was just so slow and it just alienates the wider market. We were told by Sony that the adventure market was still wide open. We're talking to them about *Broken Sword III* and they are very interested because there really isn't a game that has taken the massive adventure and really driven it forward to keep up with the times. *Shenmue*? Not for me. It looks fantastic visually, but it could have been done in 2D.

But if you want a narrative to branch it doubles the workload. And if you want those branches to branch again, it creates even more work. How do you get around these difficulties?

There are two very different ways to view the way a narrative works. Broadly, you either have it pretty linear in that you keep control of the narrative or you say it's very open and you write algorithms. Now, I've never played a game with algorithms which actually created a compelling story. One day it will work, but it's a long way off. I'm very much of the view that as a story writer I want to keep control of what's happening. So what we are doing in *Good Cop Bad Cop*, for instance, is pushing as far as I think is right to go. Ultimately the first third of the game is up for grabs and you can waver backwards and forwards. But then you can go down one of three paths. But the point is that each one of those is a really strong path and each is a strong narrative. And they are completely self contained and satisfying in their own right. The terrible risk of giving too much freedom to the player to tell their own story and develop their own plot is that they reach the end and you don't have a twist.

How will the narrative work in *Broken Sword III*?

Broken Sword III, which we have given a lot of thought to, is going to be a mixture of approaches. Can I ask myself a question? What were our thoughts on how to progress from *Broken Sword*? At the end of *Broken Sword II* I didn't feel we could do another point-and-click adventure. I felt that the technology had advanced beyond that. Technology was allowing a new generation of gameplay which had left point-and-click behind. What's exciting about PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube is that for the first time we can produce graphics which look really nice in realtime with a 3D camera. What would be a travesty, then, would be to write the gameplay of a point-and-click adventure. There are certain products that have become 3D but haven't actually increased the scope of puzzles. One of the most frustrating things about point-and-click as an interface was that you were incredibly restricted in what you could do. With *Broken Sword* some people have said – which was flattering – that it was the pinnacle of using the tools we had available. When you can start throwing the camera around you have a range of gameplay.

"We are going to write adventure games that don't have guns or gun games that are proud of being action. I think going down the middle route is dangerous"

How will these approaches work in practice?

Part of it will be detective gameplay – investigating, finding objects, talking to people. But then there is also the element of exploration, so our games will be a bit like *Ico*. That game is really nice because you can wander around, you can use the environment. Our future games will have a much bigger area to explore. It will be a mix. We are very confident that this will work. For example, you know that someone has discarded something important, so you go to a wall and pull yourself up. Or you are walking around a garden and a dog is chasing after you. You use the direct control to move as fast as you can and you can pull yourself over the wall, and the dog is still barking at the wall. You can use that as a way of getting around him. Of course, the dog can get you and it's Game Over. But that's the price you have to pay. We can bring the narrative and all the detective elements people loved in *Broken Sword* and bring it bang up to date in a 3D environment. This will create something unique.

How long down the development path are you now?

We have such a hard time, because we are really slow at the beginning. The vision and the story and everything needs to be right. To my shame I started working on it last Christmas. I went off on holiday and took my portable. That's when I started throwing ideas around. We are very close to going into the pre-production stage.

But how do you effectively bring the action and adventure elements together?

One of the criticisms of *In Cold Blood* was that people said they weren't sure if it was an adventure or a gun game. And while *In Cold Blood* got a lot of good reviews it also got some negative ones as well. If you give somebody a gun, then it becomes a gun game. From now on, we are going to write either adventure games that don't have guns or gun games that are proud of being action. I think going down the middle route, while it appeals to a number of people, is dangerous.

So it will be a case of using items to overcome enemies?

Yes, but not guns. The thing about the original *Broken Sword* is that you come up to a screen, you look for an object, and then you overcome the obstacle. With *Broken Sword III* it's more expansive. There is something blocking you but you've got this whole area to explore and many more people to interact with.

So you have more than one way to tackle a situation?

That is the key to it. There are two elements to building these kinds of game. One is to hard code two different routes. But that is missing the point. What Warren Spector and people talk about is authoring, or joint authorship. By that, they mean that the player is partially writing the outcome as well as the designer. If you have an environment with walls that you can climb, you can climb them at any point. If you have dogs walking around and you don't know where they are, you will find a point where someone may well find a way through that you never even thought of. It's about letting the world go. That is the 3D element – that is the exploration element. But on top of that we also have these detective elements, which is: "Use this bit of information on a person to get a lead." Or, "This particular object is applicable to this situation." It really is a question of giving much more freedom, genuine freedom and going down the joint authorship route but at the same time keeping control of the plot and making sure that the puzzles are completely logical.



Are you confident this has not been done before?

Yeah, absolutely confident. As I say, *Shenmue* is the one that people bring up, but *Shenmue* is very slow moving. The characters only talk to you when they want to talk to you. You are led by the nose. That's why something like *Ico* is interesting because it creates a wonderfully atmospheric world to explore and in many ways many sections [of *BSIII*] will be more like *Ico* than they will be like *Shenmue*. We want to paint a wonderful world that excites you.

Are you bringing *Broken Sword* to set top boxes? And if so, what does this medium offer game designers?

We are within days of releasing a very significant press release. But I can't say too much. The problem with interactive television at the moment is that the quality of the games is pretty poor. They are effectively parlour games. There are very technical reasons why that is the case. We have made some exclusive alliances which allow us to come up with stuff that is the equivalent of *Broken Sword* on interactive television and we will be the only people in the world that can do this. We would really like to revolutionise the interactive television market because there are so many people that are talking so much nonsense about interactive TV. At the moment the games are not compelling. We have found a way to introduce really compelling games. The actual boxes are really quite powerful, it's just the way they are being used.

But won't the input system inhibit control?

No it doesn't. Our games were originally point-and-click which is indirect control and we found that when we moved to direct control on GBA with *Broken Sword* it worked well. We kept the icons and that is actually a purer interface. We regret that we didn't explore the direct control method in this way earlier. It would have been more effective on PlayStation.

What do you think to the script agencies that have emerged in recent months?

They are interesting, aren't they? The very best of luck to them. We have a couple of writers that we are very happy with. If we stopped working with them I would certainly go to the script agencies. The people we work with tend to be individuals rather than companies and they tend to go between games and films or television.

So they can alter the original plot outline?

Yes, they have a very major input. But the point is that it is within the skeleton that fits within the vision that we want to do. I would be very nervous about divorcing the game skeleton from the story and the script. I think the same person should keep control of the story and the vision. I think to separate them is dangerous. I suspect, with the script agencies that they would want to take control of the story and unless they are very bright they might not necessarily understand or buy into the vision. And potentially you could have problems. The alternative is to write the story and write the game, and then bring them together later in the process to script edit. And that, of course, is very legitimate.

So, you are optimistic they can improve the quality of game narrative?

Yes, they are reacting to the fact, as you pointed out, that generally the quality of scripts is very poor. One of the best games at the moment is *MGS2*. But if you were to strip away the gameplay, then I doubt that the Hollywood producers would be queuing for that script if it just popped on to their desk. It is not A grade Hollywood stuff.

"We'd really like to revolutionise the interactive TV market. The actual boxes are really quite powerful, it's just the way they are being used"

Finally, is there anything else the industry could do to improve the state of game narrative?

I think the people that innovate are not necessarily the ones that are rewarded. In the sense that it is a lot more lucrative to do a conversion than to do an original game. Currently the industry is in a strange position. I mean when we wrote *Lure of the Temptress* it cost £30,000 to write. At that point the publisher and the developer split the royalties accordingly. This was because it was relatively cheap to write and the marketing was expensive. Those royalty rates have actually stayed the same and yet the price has gone up from £30,000 to £2 million. It has gone up by a huge margin. The cost to develop a game is now 50 times more expensive. It's not something that irritates me but it's something that needs to be addressed within the industry. As a developer of an original title it's incredibly difficult and it's very tempting to go down the route of doing conversions. If we want original games we have to work out a new equation for how publishers and developers work. I'm not anti-publisher at all. They are vital. But I think the relationship needs to change.

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Edge's PC is an Intel 1.7Ghz / 1 Gig RAM / GeForce 3, kindly provided by **iwantitnow.co.uk**

Edge's most played

Breath of Fire (Game Boy Advance) Capcom

Absolutely old-skool in its approach to dungeoneering, but the absence of lengthy FMV and cut-scenes are an absolute breath of fresh air to the handheld RPG.



Luigi's Mansion (GameCube) Nintendo

It might not have universal appeal, but the lovingly handcrafted environments and puzzles, and a joyful sense of characterisation, certainly win **Edge**'s vote.



Advance Wars (Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

The term 'turn-based strategy' may be a turn-off for some, but with a little Nintendo magic the genre is transformed into the GBA's friendliest title.



Halo: Combat Evolved (Xbox) Microsoft

Back in singleplayer, and heading through Legendary, every five-minute battle becomes a half-hour war, and every checkpoint brings absolute, all-consuming relief.



Out with a bang

Edge bids farewell to Sega's DC

On the cover, beneath the **Edge** logo, there is a single line of text that **Edge** has carried since issue one. The content of the line changes regularly, but its purpose has remained, broadly, the same: to provide a quick guide to the videogame systems that dominate coverage within the magazine. In issue one, that line read "Mega Drive – Super Nintendo – PC – Amiga – PC Engine – Neo Geo – 3DO". Many words have come and gone since – the near-fictional M2, the much-loved N64, and, bless it, NuMedia – and while the PC is the only machine to survive outright throughout, both Nintendo and Sega have always had some sort of presence. This is the fiftieth **Edge** cover with Dreamcast on the cover. It will also be the last.

But, oh, what a perfect way to go. *Phantasy Star Online* came too late to rescue the DC from inevitable extinction, but it did prove Sega's online dream wasn't hollow. If – and if there's ever been a console full of ifs, it's the Dreamcast – it had arrived at the other end of the system's lifespan, in place of *Pen Pen Tricelon* (**E**67, 5/10) or *Godzilla Generations* (**E**67, 5/10), things might have been different. The fact that *PSO Ver.2* arrives over here just as stores are sweeping their DC stuff away in preparation for a deluge of Xbox and GameCube miscellany is both tragic and, for a console already bathed in awkward timing, absolutely fitting.

Even more fitting, though, is that the two lead games this month also come from multiformat Sega. While *VF4* disappoints visually - there's still some residual feeling that Sega's heart isn't entirely in developing for the PS2 - at its heart is a structure that's as kinetic as ever. And *Jet Set Radio Future* is just what the Xbox needs in the post-launch drought of quality software: it's credible, exuberant, and fun.

Of course, the disappearance of the DC from the front cover doesn't mean coverage will stop entirely, and there's always the chance that someone, somewhere, is playing homebrew and coming up with something special. Clutch at straws; there's always a chance. Whatever. *PSO Ver.2* is the last major release for Sega's last console. Immerse yourself in it, enjoy homebrand Ragol while it still exists, delight in memories, do it without tears. Glimpse *Jet Set Radio*'s next-generation brother, and it's clear: The Future might not belong to Sega's hardware, but its software appears unstoppable.











Jet Set Radio Future

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Smilebit** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), March 29 (UK)**







Training missions are available at your base, the Garage, where you can talk to the crew and review your progress

There's an easy way to write this review, and a less easy way. The easy way is to get caught up in style over substance, to be overwhelmed by the first stunning moments when skaters twist and trick through gorgeous washed-out cities drawn all the way to the horizon, and when the first tune kicks in and cut-up beats plead for you to Understand – Understand – The Concept Of Love. It is to thrill in the aftershock, to wax lyrical about the bouncing scratch-led Grand Royale-led soundtrack, the perfect blend of Japanese/US cool, and the jaw-dropping silkscreen imagery. It is to write this sentence: "*Jet Set Radio Future* is like *Jet Set Radio*... but on futuristic crack!" and to follow it with a score just below your non-exclusive theoretical maximum.

The less easy way is to spoil the party, and to report *JSRF*'s disappointments. The dreadful camera, for example – a dizzying hangover from the Dreamcast original, which forgets about convenience and natural movement, strives to provide perfect aesthetics, and then disappears behind a wall. Or the simplicity, the obscene amount of health sprays rendering all enemy encounters as battles of persistence over skill. Or the apparent single-track AI on the enemy bots, which, while perhaps inevitable thanks to the environmental complexity, is ultimately depressing on a next-generation machine. But all that's later. For now, let's get caught up in the hype.

Jet Set Radio Future lies at the core of Microsoft's Japanese plans, one of a handful of games intended to convince an entire nation that the future of electronic entertainment lies beyond its shores. Luckily, it provides most of things the eastern pixelphile hankers after: disposable twitch-gaming addiction, flippantly self-conscious cool, and the purest fun.

One of a handful of games intended to convince an entire nation that the future of electronic entertainment lies beyond its shores



Skaters will grind automatically off advertising hoardings; you must master this technique to reach higher ground

Like the first game, it involves inline skating around the streets of Tokyo, collecting spraycans and spraying tags on pre-defined graffiti-primed areas. And it's as graphically striking as its well-received inspiration, too: *Jet Set Radio* introduced cel-shading to a smitten public, and *Future* is the smooth followup it deserved, a thrilling, speed-fuelled cartoon dream. It's slick, angular – and it stuns.



Grinding a rusting rail in an industrial slum might not sound like the most inviting experience, but when you're high above the city, the views are stunning – and the draw distance breathtaking

The game takes place in a series of large arenas, interlinked as one city-wide map. There's no level-select screen; areas and paths open up as the story demands them, and then can be visited as often as the player wishes. The route to the next destination may take the player through several locations, and other objectives become apparent en route. Even after the game is complete, after the credits have rolled, and Smilebit has Thanked You For Playing, there's still much incentive to return and explore this virtual Tokyo. Graffiti Souls, the Gotta Catch 'Em All element, appear on the map only after certain conditions have been met. Even once you've fulfilled the requirements – single-trick points totals, or *Tony Hawk*-style 'Grind the Chimney' requests – you have to work out how to reach the collectible Souls. It's a non-linear multi-tiered reward system, and it works superbly.

The modification of the graffiti system also contributes to the internal beautification of *JSRF*'s mechanics. The Dreamcast release halted the natural skating flow for a twist-the-thumbstick graffiti-painting subgame. *Future* discards this in favour of much simpler right-trigger-and-it's-done methodology. Some will bemoan the simplicity, but they're wrong: it's the sort of dumbing-down that doesn't make you yearn for the past, but makes you wish the past was like this: this smooth, this instinctive. The lack of time limits also changes the feel of the game, enabling you to take in environments and plan assaults on difficult-to-reach tag-spots. It's a more paced adventure, without being any less thrilling.

But it's also flawed. The ease with which the challenges fall is disheartening, and not helped by the game's own idiocy. You see it

Previously in **E**99, **E**100











Pressing the analogue stick into the socket locks your skateboarder's speed, enabling you to spraypaint wide tags in one smooth fly-by motion

most in the graffiti tag events, when you're arbitrarily awarded a victory without spraying all your opponents, or when you knock an enemy from their preset racing line and they find themselves stuck blindly behind an immovable object. It's stupid and sloppy, but it's a technical flaw overcome by enthusiasm, and the desire for repetition – right from the start, *Jet Set Radio Future* begs to be loved, and it's hard to shut that out.

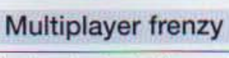
And why would you want to? This is the Californian Valley Girl of games: beautiful as you can imagine, dumb as you suspect, and as entertaining as hell.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



One of the final tracks is based on a rollercoaster ride around a dinosaur themepark, which means huge grinds and cleverly hidden secrets for suicidal leapers

Smilebit has ignored the tedious demands of gravity, and enables the player to perform vertical and looping grinds even at low speeds



Multiplayer frenzy

Another advantage the Xbox version has over its Dreamcast predecessor is the introduction of a multiplayer mode, where up to four players can compete in any of five basic events – tagging opponents, capturing flags, spraying tags, straight out racing, and *Jet Set Radio*'s take on rollerball. Cans are replaced by planet-shaped collectibles which, *Mario Kart*-style, offer a random passive/aggressive bonus. It works neatly in favour of the singleplayer mode, too – characters are only available for selection in multiplayer once they've been won over via challenges in the story.

Virtua Fighter 4

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sega-AM2** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), May 10 (UK)**









Beat 13 progressively skilled opponents in Arcade mode and Dural (above) emerges for a one-off bout. The lack of ending sequences is a disappointment

Broadly, beat 'em ups can be divided into two schools: those which rely on the precise timing of combos and stringing numerous moves together in the hope of pummelling an opponent into submission, and those which deliver fewer moves, an effective blocking manoeuvre and therefore a greater emphasis on swift strategies. One places the emphasis on spectacular attacks; the other on defence, followed by cunning counters. It's essentially the difference between ballet and 'Riverdance'.

Some can't help but be impressed by the choreographed whirling of limbs and the sheer showmanship of titles like *Tekken*. And there's a place for such titles. But for depth and subtlety, more astute fighting game enthusiasts turn to the *Virtua Fighter* series, and, in more recent years, the *Dead or Alive* games. It's somewhat disappointing, then, to see that *Virtua Fighter 4* has lost some of the unique ingredients that made it stand out from the frenzied competition. The series' general elegance, pacing and emphasis on counter-attacking on the fly has diminished in favour of learning which combos link together most effectively. The faster pace certainly makes for a more aggressive dynamic, but it's at the expense of spontaneous strategy.

One of the major disappointments is the loss of the sublime Dodge button, which elevated *Virtua Fighter 3tb* above its peers. It's still possible to circle around your opponent, but the commands lack efficacy and are certainly less reliable than the eight-way motion system employed in *Soul Calibur*. This inhibits movement around the arena and effectively reduces the value and importance of having a third plane. Indeed, the arenas have lost the elevated sections – so vital to launching attacks in *Virtua Fighter 3tb* – and consist of flat surfaces only. There are a few good visual effects – such as barriers exploding on impact or snow shifting underfoot – but they have no effect on the action inside the ring.

Not the groundbreaking title many would have you believe but there's still a distinguished and technical example of the genre underneath

But this isn't to say that Yu Suzuki's latest brainchild is without its own unique charms. Among manic bouts, there are moments of intricacy and subtlety. When an opponent's throw is broken, countered and then severely punished with an effective combo, the sense of empowerment is exalted. Indeed, *Virtua Fighter 4* is at its best when your opponent is stunned. Link together the most effective range of moves to capitalise on such openings and the game really shines.



Don't believe those who say that the PS2 version of *Virtua Fighter 4* is an arcade-perfect conversion. Graphically, it suffers from a lack of effective antialiasing, leaving harsh edges on the fighters

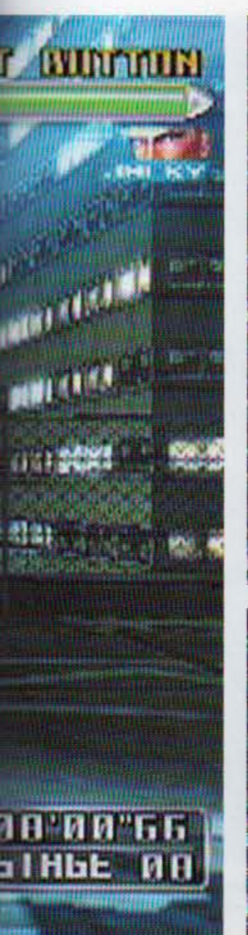
The range of moves on offer is impressive, too. Take to the Command Training arena and the basic combos can be perfected. But employing them effectively in a twoplayer scenario is another matter, requiring quick reflexes, judicious use of the block command and a intimate knowledge of the most powerful combo links. During fights this relies rather too much on rote learning and less on applying specific moves, but the action can be compelling nevertheless.

In terms of game options, *Virtua Fighter 4* delivers a comprehensive package. Along with Arcade mode (13 stages, plus a one-off encounter with Dural) there is the addition of Training, AI Sparring, Vs. and Kumite. Where Kumite offers an excellent survival challenge against a string of opponents of varying skill, the AI training option is something new. Here, it's possible to build up a customisable character by training it to employ any of the commands available (see 'Pocket masters' boxout, right). An interesting if slightly gimmicky addition to the usual beat 'em up fare.

Ultimately, *VF4* is not the groundbreaking title many would have you believe. But take away the Emperor's New Clothes and there's still a distinguished and technical example of the genre underneath.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Previously in E96, E105













Command Training takes players through the paces and is an engaging way of learning all the key moves and special combo attacks



The throws and clinches are the most dramatic moves in the game, often resulting in a close-up of the action if executed successfully. They inflict horrific damage, too



Despite the odd visual nicety – snow moving underfoot, for example – the scenery has less impact on play than it does in *Dead or Alive 3*



Pocket masters

Virtua Fighter 4 offers a novel *Pokémon*-style training arena for your customisable AI fighter. Teach it to throw and it will sling opponents around the ring with some skill; teach it punch-kick combos and it'll use a quicker and more direct fighting style. You can then save enhanced characters to the Memory Card, give them a change of clothing and even set them against another friend's AI character. There are limits to your fighter's skills, but it makes for an engaging addition to the package nevertheless.

Herdy Gerdy

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Core Design** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**



Levels vary in size, with prize challenges taking place in small, closed-off areas, and main stages that sprawl in every direction. Revisiting levels is sometimes crucial, sometimes merely a scoring exercise





With infamous handling horrors fresh in the memory (*Wacky Races*, anyone?), *Herdy Gerdy*'s awkward moments are further proof that high-speed action and cel-shaded environments are – *Jet Set Radio* aside – rarely a perfect mix

There is a peculiar chain of emotions that defines the *Herdy Gerdy* experience. It begins with the gratification of progressing to a new stage, proceeds into sheer delight at the next big, exquisitely-detailed environment unfurled before your eyes, and concludes, sooner or later, with sheer frustration. The glorious illusion is shattered; the logic of the in-game ecosystem is irreparably ruptured; the binary drudgery is all that remains. It's a disappointment intensified by the knowledge that, relieved of its rough edges, *Herdy Gerdy* could have been a dream to play.

"Technology is not just one aspect of a game that can be happily divorced from the others," wrote **Steven Poole** in **E**107. Rather, "Everything else depends upon it." As a title combining 3D adventure, puzzle and platform elements, management of a dozen species of creatures with distinct behaviour patterns, an emphasis on mastering environments and a variety of time-sensitive tasks, there were two basic requirements that *Herdy Gerdy* needed to get right – or nearly right, at any rate. First, a camera system capable of seamlessly switching between clear and informative long-distance overviews (for the herding dimension) and the usual thirdperson view for segments of exploration, interaction and puzzle-solving. Second, creatures with consistent and coherent AI routines, rather than ones that are hit-and-miss and buggy. It manages neither, and it's an awful shame, because there's so else much to admire here – so much evidence of effort beyond the call of duty – that imagining what might have been becomes unavoidable.

Herdy Gerdy is both distinguished and undone by its stubborn insistence on doing things on a grand scale

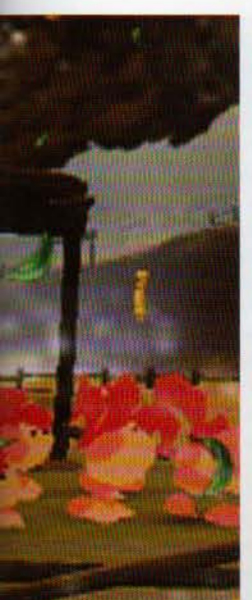


***Herdy Gerdy*'s use of music is a joy. Glorious streams of visible, glittering notes emerge from our hero's enchanted instruments while he plays, and there are countless memorable situational motifs to savour**

The premise is simple. Expert herder Gedryn has been laid low by evil arch-rival Sadorf, and his young son, Gerdy, is called upon to save the day. En route to the climactic herding competition, little Gerdy must acquire skills, magical equipment and expertise by completing related tasks and unlocking ever more mysterious and exotic new areas. Harnessing the strengths and weaknesses of individual varieties of animal is the key to progress, with early levels simply requiring the ushering of creatures into designated pens while the gradually-introduced puzzle dimension of the later stages demands a somewhat more cerebral approach. Its closest contemporary is *Pikmin*, but while that game revelled in the confines of a back garden, *Herdy Gerdy* is both distinguished and undone by its stubborn insistence on doing things on a grand scale.

On a purely aesthetic level, *Herdy Gerdy*'s ambition pretty much pays off. Despite its unlikely fusion of Disney-style sentiment, rural atmospherics reminiscent of *Ocarina Of Time*, Norse and Gaelic myth, and some underwhelming talking animals that resemble Rare's less distinguished rodents, the gameworld is a sumptuous entity to behold. The subtle gradations in the colour and texture of the terrain, the tiny trimmings, like footprints and flapping

Previously in **E**96, **E**106

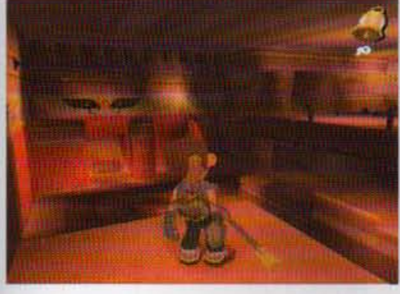






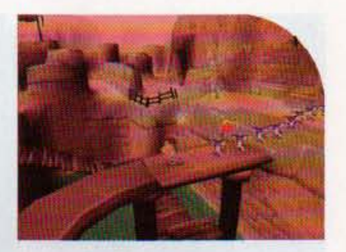








Pikmin's camera options attracted criticism, but *Herdy Gerdy* would have been transformed if it had matched them. Its curious hybrid angle on events more often confuses than clarifies or informs



Creatures' features

There are 12 basic varieties of creature for Gerdy to interact with (although you have to apply his herding methods in other one-off encounters during the game). The Doops, one of the earliest species you encounter, have to be chased to their destination. The Bleeps resemble purple gremlins and are enchanted by the sound of Gerdy's flute; thanks to long ears and 'copter tails, they can float down from ledges, but drown in water. The Gromps are the primary foe in the earlier parts of the game, but at least you can lead them blindly into traps via slapstick chases. Later species, such as the Quivels and Grimps, are far more difficult to outwit.

butterflies, the game's enchanting, evocatively-lit excursions into darker folkloric territory, even the *Looney Tunes*-style slapstick quality of the ursine, bog-standard pink predators called Gromps – as long as you're just looking, it all works perfectly. It's when you pick up the controller that the problems kick in.

Patient gamers will put up with the multiple restarts, the accidental drownings (in keeping with tradition, swimming, like climbing, is an ability that must be earned along the way). They will struggle beyond the camera's blind spots and make the most of the onscreen map, even though that map is ill-equipped to provide all-important information about the game's huge, complex and multi-tiered environments. They will even grin and bear the fact that it is sometimes easier to lead their charges through a predator or piece of shrubbery than it is to get them to go round it. After all, there's no question that the game's visual splendour and set-pieces are rich rewards, or that objectives are, in the main, established with sufficient clarity to prevent aimless wandering, or that new skills, creatures and gameplay elements are thoughtfully introduced via a sensible learning curve. What's debatable is whether the nuts-and-bolts of *Gerdy's* gameplay, excessively loose as they are, ever really engender a true sensation of control, or immersion, or fun untainted by the fear of the next random, unforeseeable cock-up. And when it comes to the crunch, that's surely what counts.

Edge rating: Six out of ten



Gerdy is pursued through a callous-chaffing winter landscape by a bad-tempered Gromp. And he was only looking for something to herd...

Star Wars Obi-Wan

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **LucasArts** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), March 28 (UK)** Previously in **E86**











Sadly *Obi-Wan* rarely captures the effortless elegance and grace of the mature Alec Guinness; instead it seems to build upon the dodgy haircuts and slightly stilted acting of the younger Ewan McGregor



A twoplayer mode and arena combat levels feel as if they've simply been tacked on as an afterthought

Thish looksh like a Tushkun Toomb

Judging by the sound of things, LucasArts have chosen to employ an American voice actor to impersonate a Scottish actor impersonating an English actor. The results are not far off an episode of 'The Nessies', but bear little resemblance to the actual 'Star Wars' movies. It may seem like a trifling matter to LucasArts, but the risibility of the outcome demonstrates the importance of good voice acting to the successful implementation of a licence, and compares unfavourably with the company's own *Rogue Leader*, and just about every *Star Trek* game developed in recent years.



This can't be the same game that started life around October 1998, as a sequel to the classic *Jedi Knight*. Surely, the decision to bring the title out on Xbox instead of PC required wholly new code to be developed from the ground up. Because **Edge** dearly hopes that this blandly textured, poorly animated, feebly voice acted, sloppily structured, fairly generic thirdperson action title isn't the product of nearly three and a half years of endeavour.

It does have its moments. Segueing from Force Pulling a weapon out of one combatant's hands to Force Pushing another over the edge of a walkway, before Force Throwing a piece of debris at another and dispatching the rest with an imperious slash of your lightsaber (all during en-Forced bullet time if necessary) can be highly satisfying. But the game's defects are almost too numerous to mention. Poor AI, a cumbersome camera (complete with temperamental targeting lock-on), bland textures, stuttering framerates, incomplete death animations and jerky transitions to cut-scenes are the tip of the iceberg.

There's also the unlikely liberties that have been taken with the licence; it simply doesn't make sense that Queen Amidala should be kidnapped on Tatooine in a scene not shown in the movie, or that a Tusken Raider's gaffi stick should be able to parry a lightsaber. Those scenes that do make it into the game from the movie (notably Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan's showdown on the Trade Federation battleship) simply highlight technical inadequacies.

More significantly, the level structure is appallingly sloppy. The placement of enemies and power-ups is haphazard and conveys no sense of rhythm or tempo to missions. And Arena battles with members of the Jedi High Council don't punctuate the flow of the game, they interrupt it. Like the twoplayer splitscreen arena mode, they feel tacked on for the sake of it.

In short, *Obi-Wan* feels so incomplete that it's simply a wonder the game got made. It's hardly a stunning advert for the technical capabilities of the Xbox, nor an endorsement of Microsoft's message that those capabilities facilitate more sophisticated forms of gameplay. It's not going to attract any new followers to the 'Star Wars' cause, and it's not going to appeal to those already converted to that cause.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Phantasy Star Online: Ver.2

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sonic Team** Price: **£30** Release: **March 1**

Back when *Phantasy Star Online* was young; when the first servers launched, and when the only people on them were Japanese or hardcore importers; before the Americans and the Europeans came en masse, and before the flaws appeared in Sega's no-cheat ideology; back then, *Phantasy Star Online* was magical. "**Edge** has never witnessed a friendlier online community," ran our first review. "Everyone watches each others' backs. Everyone smiles when the Dragon gets slayed."

Then the smiles cracked. *PSO*'s basic co-operative dynamic – team up with three others and do some thirdperson *Gauntlet*-style monster-killing, level up and watch your stats rise, repeat over hundreds of hours all in the name of fancier weapons – shattered in the face of cheating and hack-based player killing. Rare items became commonplace, hosting open games became dangerous, and all the socialising drained away.

Ver.2 makes little attempt to stop this, just adding the ability to reach higher levels, some new graphics and missions, and a couple of minigames. This, presumably, is what Naka-san originally envisaged *PSO* to be, before it was thrown out as a lifebelt for the drowning Dreamcast, and as such there's a vague feeling of resentment. If *PSO* was a PC title you'd expect *Ver.2* to be a patch, but it's exactly what the title says: a version two, a more polished version of the original.

Which means it's still superficially plain in structure, but still undeniably compulsive, and still cultivates an atmosphere that, with the right companions, proves unforgettable. It's finding those companions that's the problem; these days all the rooms are locked, and even when you find an open game, the people inside could have the same impatient mindset that smashed *PSO* when it was at its peak. Those with characters and contact lists from the first game will be fine. Newcomers – and there *will* be newcomers, those for whom Dreamkey 3.0 removes the phonebill barrier from unrestricted entertainment – may find the initiation rather more harsh.

But it's worth battling through the worst elements of the broken community, because this is still a dream, one born from genius and nearly destroyed by stupidity. Ragol's like a ghost town today; it's been emptied by aggression, but it's as beautiful and precious as the day it was created. You should see it before it fades away completely.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





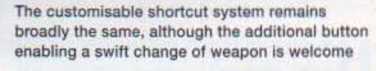
More modes

While it's not a sequel, hardcore *PSO* fans will probably find that version two offers enough reasons to buy the game a second time. The extra missions and levels do little that's different, but provide welcome variation for those at high enough levels to experience them. A Deathmatch mode makes player-killing legitimate for the first time, and while it emphasises the lack of sophistication in the combat, there are enough options to make the event a solid diversion. Most notable, perhaps, is the Hardcore Challenge mode, where teams are restricted to one life each and forced through punishing levels of enemies.









The customisable shortcut system remains broadly the same, although the additional button enabling a swift change of weapon is welcome







While the new graphics provide a welcome change of scenery for hardened hunters, the feeling that the changes are superficial is inescapable. Still, the monsters in Ultimate Mode prove to be some challenge

Invader

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Xicat Interactive** Developer: **Formula/Lost Boys Games** Price: **£30** Release: **March 28** Previously in **E**94, **E**103









Powered-up weapons can be collected stored in one of two available slots, and switched with a press of the R button. A more friendly dynamic might have let the player retain the weapon not in use at the time of death, but, despite its colourful cartoon appearance, *Invader* isn't friendly

Known as *Kaisertal* when **Edge** last saw it in **E**103, *Invader* always seemed like it might be special. A vertically scrolling shoot 'em up, it follows the evolutionary pattern at which the genre peaked 15 years ago. So, bright sprites twist down the screen; tin bullets arc in the opposite direction; eight intense levels culminate in screen-sized boss confrontations. A secondary missile button allows the player to lock onto ground targets, and there's also a wide range of primary weapon power-ups, each of which can be upgraded to three levels of mindless destruction.

Those are the basics; behind them lies an experience substantially more chaotic, more *Giga Wing* than *Gradius*. It's difficult, too, thanks to the single-shot fatalities, some smart, well-angled bullets, and brief moments where survival is near impossible without memorising the attack patterns of enemies. It's also, at times, hideously unbalanced: dying means you lose your weapon, turning battles into epic wars of attrition. The lively *Bangaio*-style presentation and two-cart twoplayer mode enrich the experience, but it's still a game that feels rushed: more than a shoot 'em up played straight, but less than **Edge** hoped.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Guilty Gear X Advance Edition

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Sammy** Developer: **Arc System Works** Price: **¥4,800 (£25)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Heaven or hell? It certainly looks divine, retaining the series' trademark overblown aesthetics and ridiculous special moves. It plays well, too, at least on a superficial level. All the key features of the DC and PS2 versions are present, most crucially the creative tension gauge system and associated passive and aggressive attacks, and the wide variety of basic moves that snap neatly into satisfying combos. Perhaps it's too easy, too neat in that respect: unbreakable juggles are easily executed, and often lead to cheap KOs.

But that's not the worst sin, by any means, because *Guilty Gear*'s opponent AI isn't so much bad as utterly non-existent. The game difficulty can be set to four levels, but all that appears to do is increase the likelihood of your attacks being blocked, and even at the highest setting – labelled 'very hard' – it's breathtakingly easy to complete. Survival mode extends the lifespan a little, if only because it's infinite and offers extra types of characters for those who progress far enough through it. But, aside from twoplayer two-cart entertainment, **Edge** can't see any reason to bother, and that means while it's not completely hellish, it definitely deserves purgatory.

Edge rating: Three out of ten









Accepting that the game will lose some of its visual charm in the drop in system power, Sammy have done a fine job of the conversion. While the tag and three-on-three settings would be welcome additions under other circumstances, the lack of challenge here makes them worthless

Command & Conquer: Renegade

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house (Westwood)** Price: **£30** Date: **March 1**

Unsurprisingly, *Renegade* is *Command & Conquer* writ large. It boasts the same sense of urgency and immediacy; the same footage on tactical readout monitors; a familiar set of vehicles and buildings; that unremitting build-up of units and reinforcements; the customarily-limited-but-efficient-in-an-arcade-manner AI; that oversimplistic yet charming plot of good and evil – and you get to play as a Commando, one of the original game's most superheroic units. In short, it's an excellent distillation of the hallmarks of the series.

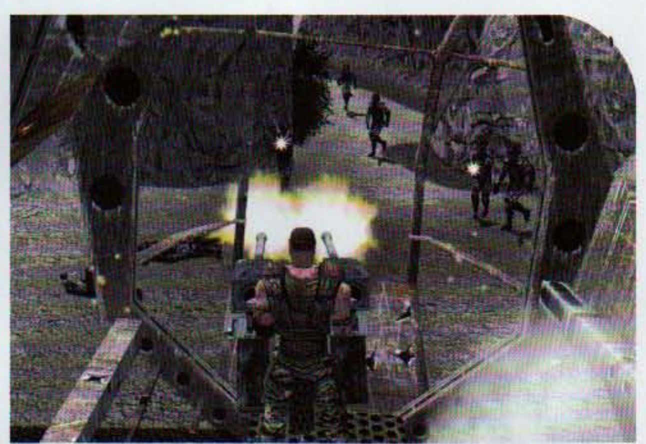
But while the range of vehicles and weaponry, straightforward mission objectives and exotic locales might have been sufficiently enjoyable some years ago, when the game first started development, they all seem rather dated besides current FPS benchmarks. It's all just a bit too predictable and restrictive. And, unfortunately, a tactically limited and slightly bewildering multiplayer mode is scant compensation for such fundamental limitations.

So while *C&C* die-hards will enjoy familiar gameplay themes in a novel context, a general audience will be left feeling slightly underwhelmed by the average execution of well-worn conventions.

Edge rating: Five out of ten









***Renegade* distils the tank rush game dynamic and cartoon morality of previous chapters in the *C&C* franchise, taking substantial effort to preserve the finer details of the game universe to keep fans happy. But with the core gameplay looking dated next to other, more modern, titles vying for FPS glory, and a fairly rudimentary multiplayer mode tacked on for the sake of it, it's unlikely to last the long haul**

Golden Sun

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Camelot** Price: **£30** Release: **March**



Stats, monsters, hitpoints and spells. Little of *Golden Sun* will stun hardened role playing gamers, but the compulsive qualities natural to the genre and gentle accessibility should reward new devotees







An RPG so old school you'd be forgiven for thinking it's a Super Famicom conversion, *Golden Sun* provides exactly what 16bit fetishists hoped the GBA would provide. While the first ten minutes are suitably dramatic, the game doesn't really get going until after some sedate narration and simple *Zelda*-style NPC interaction. But as soon as its trad-console RPG stylings hit full flow, it's nearly impossible to put down. At its heart lies turn-based combat, which is handled elegantly and, aside from a few frustratingly difficult battles, proves delicately well-balanced.

Side quests, irritating random encounters, monster-catching subquests: everything else you'd expect from a last-generation adventure is here, too. There's an argument that its quality marks it out as worthy of more than a half-page review, but the hardcore RPG fans who have already experienced it on import shouldn't need their purchases justifying, and there really isn't that much more to say. *Golden Sun* is a good game which offers nothing new, but offers what it has with exuberance and depth, and now the European release gives every GBA owner a welcome opportunity to experience its unashamedly retro charms.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Drakan: The Ancients' Gates

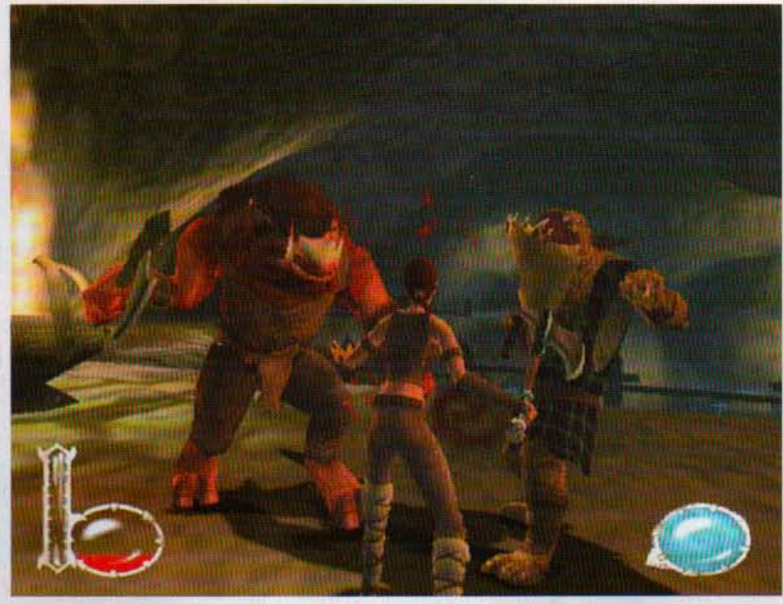
Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Surreal Software** Price: **£40** Release: **May** Previously in **E**84

Effectively a sequel to *Draken: Order of the Flame,* which appeared on the PC last year, *The Ancients' Gates* on PS2 is one step up from the original 3D fantasy adventure, replete with new plot, and initially feels like a medieval version of *Tomb Raider*.

However, there are several key features that set it apart from Lara – namely the fact that the well-stacked female lead (Rynn) is joined on her quest by dragon-shaped sidekick (Arokh), and certain levels can only be completed by using both characters. The adventuring is also underpinned by some lightweight RPG mechanics – swords break, spells can be learned and abilities (such as mêlée and arrow-shooting) honed over time.

Tasked to unseal four magic gates and return dragons to the world, there are 15 vast levels to explore in all. The design is dominated by narrow tunnels and gloomy caves, but large open landscapes beg to be explored, too, from mist-shrouded swamplands to ruined castlescapes protected by a skeletal garrison that rise out of the earth in true Ray Harryhausen style. It all combines to create a big adventure that's better than you expect, but not quite as good as you hoped.

Edge rating: Six out of ten



Drakan's large and detailed graphics give the game a quality feel. The gameplay, however, doesn't bust the RPG genre open. Consequently, while pretty, it has a tendency to be repetitive and mostly linear





The gameplay alternates between thirdperson hack-and-slash, and bouts of dragon-riding. Basic puzzle elements spin out the hey-nonny-nonny storyline

Ico (PAL)

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **SCEI** Price: **£40** Release: **March** Previously in **E**86, **E**104



The immediately striking thing about *Ico* is the clean, statistic-free viewpoint it gives you of the game world. It's not only aesthetically pleasing, but also cements the game's investigative philosophy





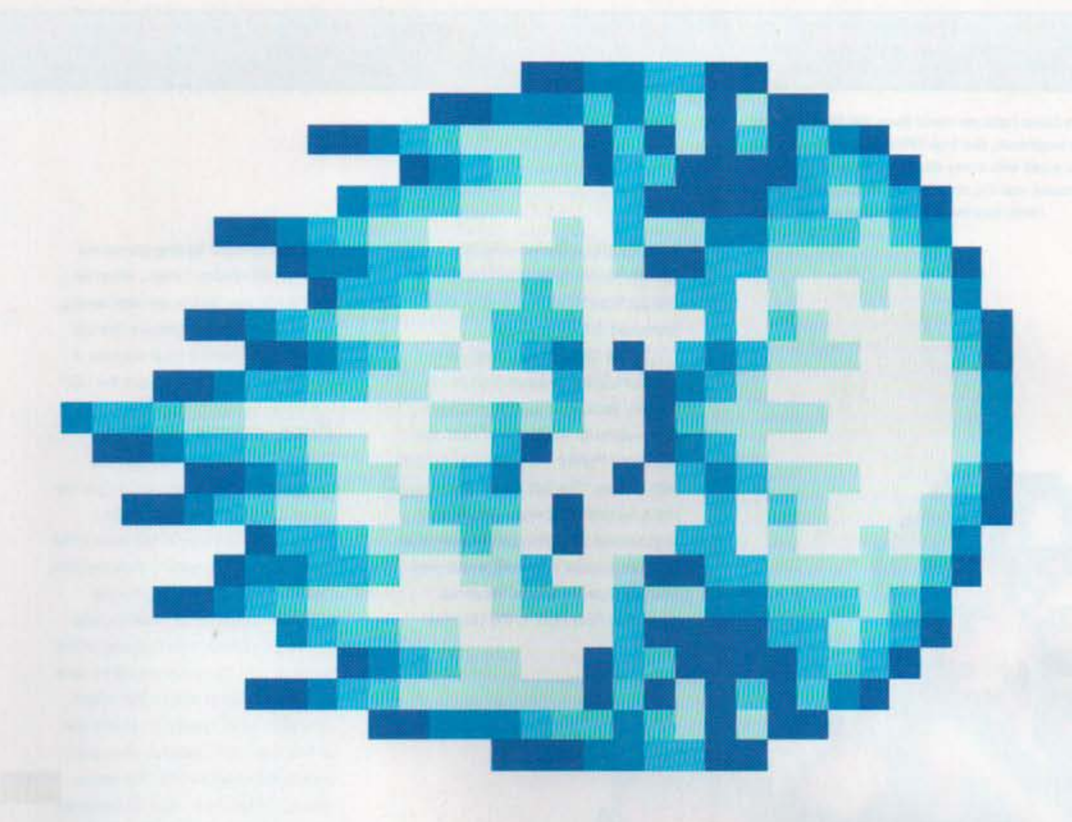
Ico's world is stone grey and sunlight green, but avoids spectral monotony with clever lighting and stunning architecture

The adventure of a young horned boy, Ico, and his quest to escape a towering stone castle, *Ico* was first reviewed in **E**104. This, the PAL conversion, arrives with little hype, but deserves recognition. Essentially, it's an arcade adventure, with the emphasis on exploring spacious locations and taking in the clean, dust-laden atmosphere. But it isn't a fast game; indeed, it's a smartly built one that demands savouring. While the castle always appears as a coherent whole, it's actually split into puzzle-based sections, each leading to the next, and interspersed with simple one-button combat.

And, agreeably, the PAL delay appears justified. The AI of Ico's companion, Yorda, has been twisted in response to criticisms from the US market, the appearance of monsters is now randomised to improve the replay value, and camera angles and the control system have also been fine-tuned. All pleasant improvements, no question, but it's the clean interface, calm dynamic and striking imagery that really capture attention. If anything, it's the clearest pointer yet towards one future of videogames, and it's a gentle smack in the face to anyone who insists the PS2 is without artistic merit or creative soul.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten





The making of...

Street Fighter II

Created to catch a wave of interest in fighting games, it was a sequel born from obligation, not desire. Expectations were low; then people learned how to Hadoken. Remember?

Format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Original release date: **1991**

Remember: ↓↘→Ⓟ. ↓↘→Ⓟ. ↓↘→Ⓟ. It's that sort of game. The sort of game that breeds obsession.

"Oh, there have been many obsessive users," **Noritaka Funamizu**, the lead producer on *Street Fighter II*, thinks back and smiles. "I do have one example I can tell you about..." ↓. "One young man, from the Aomori prefecture flew to our office in Osaka and told the security he wanted to meet me." ↘. "He said he had great ideas about a fighting game and he would not return to his home until he had made me read his notes." →. "I did not meet him. We gave him lots of goods and made him return to his home safely." Ⓟ. Funamizu-san laughs.

"It was a great time," he continues. "I mean, it may have been the greatest time for our arcade sales. Our CPS-1 [arcade board] was just finalised and the first game was ready, *Final Fight*. We all wanted to make new things. I have real good memories of those times." And then he pauses, and that brings the inevitable futuristic caveat. "On the other hand, during the following years, the company became too big and we were always asked to make the same kind of titles,



Ken and Ryu's basic balance made them the most popular choice for beginners, but true *SFII* masters would learn how to excel with every character. One factor in the game's success was the arcade-culture show-off factor. Pride was beating an expert with Dhalsim

Final Fight-type games or fighting games. I became bored of this. But of that particular time, I have very good memories. I really enjoyed it."

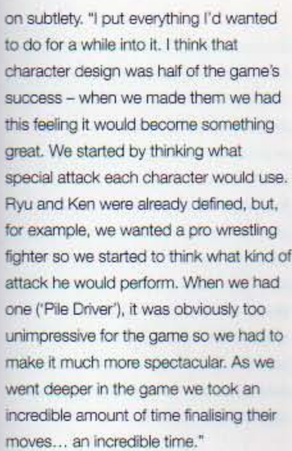
It was 13 years ago, 1989, and Capcom, under pressure from its US branch, decided to start work upon a follow-up to its mediocre '87 beat 'em up, *Street Fighter*. Funamizu-san himself was unsure. "The first *Street Fighter* was not a success. But when everybody forgot about it, fighting games started to become popular in the US, so we were asked to make a sequel. When we presented *Final Fight* to the US, they asked us to make fighting games our priority. I felt uneasy. I mean, when we finished *FF* they told us we were wrong, that it would never succeed in the US. *Final Fight* became a huge success. It sold more than 80,000 units in the US."

Crazy people

Despite its concerns, the Japanese developer threw all its resources into the game, installing Funamizu-san as producer and bringing in two more of its most respected designers alongside him. "Yasuda Akira was in charge of the character design, while Nishitani Akira [now CEO of Arika] was in charge of the game design. Two crazy people for sure. There were a lot of staff on the project, around 35 to 40 people, a hell of a size at that time – the maximum you could expect then would be 20. This was a record: I mean, there were 20 designers in charge of the characters alone. The entire project took around two years, and people said if *Street Fighter II* failed Capcom was over but, hey, come on, *Final Fight* was such a success that there was never going to be a problem."

Funamizu-san's plan wasn't built

on subtlety. "I put everything I'd wanted to do for a while into it. I think that character design was half of the game's success – when we made them we had this feeling it would become something great. We started by thinking what special attack each character would use. Ryu and Ken were already defined, but, for example, we wanted a pro wrestling fighter so we started to think what kind of attack he would perform. When we had one ('Pile Driver'), it was obviously too unimpressive for the game so we had to make it much more spectacular. As we went deeper in the game we took an incredible amount of time finalising their moves… an incredible time."



But there was one thing that Capcom didn't really worry about. "Many think, wrongly, we put a lot of attention into the game balance but it is not true. Why do people play our games? Because they are fun. A game based on good balance alone is crap. What kind of fun can you provide when you push a button? What fun is there in pushing a button several times? Only a child has fun in simply hitting a wall or a surface again and again.

"The answer is in animation patterns. You have to design them, modify them until you have a very enjoyable result, optimal visual comfort. Even if you've designed everything from the beginning, you always find during the development process the need to have a new kind of damage in the face of a given attack or situation. The relationship between the move and the damage is very important. That gives the player the comfort, the incentive for him to play the game. Then all you have to do is polish the thing, set the balance."

Accidental hero

But the need for extra animations wasn't the only thing that arose during the development process. "One thing is quite amazing: the combo. It was an accident. Really. While I was making a bug check during the car bonus stage – you know the one in which you have to destroy a car – well, while doing that I noticed something strange, curious. I taped the sequence and we saw that during the punch timing, it was possible to add a second hit and so on. I thought this was something impossible to make useful inside a game, as the timing balance was too hard to catch. So we decided to leave the feature as a hidden one.

"The most interesting thing is that this became the base for future fighting titles. Later we were able to make the timing more comfortable and the combo into a real feature. In *SFII* we thought if you got the perfect timing you could place several hits, up to four I think. Then we managed to place eight! A bug? Maybe." The quality-control reminiscence produces an afterthought, "Speaking of bugs, *SFII* had a hell of a mountain of bugs. I think it was a record inside Capcom. We built around 26 masters. So many days I spent in the office. But we made it at the end."

Millions of twitch-fighting thrill seekers will be glad they did. *Street Fighter II* was the defining point in the one-on-one beat 'em up's genesis, a game which offered instant entertainment for casual arcade browsers alongside an unsurpassed level of depth and strategy for devoted players. Not bad for a company which, at the time, was something of a minor player in the beat 'em up community. "I always considered our company as someone fighting with a bamboo stick. We didn't have the resources to equal Sega's or Namco's hardware. We had our own level of resources. While they were racing in F1



cars, we were in basic Hondas. However, we had great skill. If you take this little Honda, it has a very good engine and with only one litre of petrol it can cover quite a distance. Of course, distance is not an issue." He laughs.

"Our CPS-1 was made with this in mind. While it didn't offer the latest technology or CG, it was flexible, able to give the creators the possibility to use and modify data in all ways. It could handle a large amount of different graphics data onscreen. A rock would not be the same from one part of the screen to the next. It addressed many memory issues, which made our work easier compared to others. While Ryu was made in 8Mbit, we were able to make Zangief in 12Mbit. On other boards, you would have to make every character in 8Mbit. The hardest issue was to make the game fun. And..." Another pause, another moment of future-regret, "We did it so well with *SFII* that we've been asked to continue that for a long period, always fighting with our bamboo stick, and to keep people finding the same fun in our games."

So Funamizu-san would eventually find himself a victim of his own success, of his impulsive desire for over-the-top fighting fun, but oh, what fun: eight playable characters, each with an overwhelming arsenal of moves at their disposal, and, crucially, special attacks whose intricacy was proportional to their effectiveness. *SFII* soon dominated the arcades, and, regardless of whether it arose by chance or through design, the level of balance was stunning. Not flawless, though: dedicated arcade players would soon discover flaws like the 'tick', the act of using a light jab with Guile, forcing the other player to block, and following it up with an unstoppable throw. Still, the kinetic pull of the game was enough to see dubious tactics morally outlawed in all right-thinking arcades.





Beating up cars and bricks provided a cute and unexpected diversion to players, but would also prove to be the unwitting inspiration behind combos



Cabinet shuffle

At the end of *Street Fighter II*'s dev cycle, the team finally got a chance to join the public in relaxing with its product. "The work was over and we had so much free time. We gathered in the office and played games. We all thought the game would never sell much in Japan. We were sure the fighting boom would never happen. Well, in the US it already was and soon, fighting games started to be popular in Japan. The main reason is the cabinet. The normal way at the time was to have two players looking at the same screen, so they would sit together, side by side. One day we started to get complaints from people angry the game could not be displayed correctly. We were very concerned and unable to understand why. Then we saw it: someone had made a VS cabinet. It was one cabinet with two screens connected to it. VS. We were astonished... well, it was obvious that the game would have difficulty in displaying the data correctly.

"So, anyway, we addressed the issue and the fighting game boom started all over the country. We made *Street Fighter 2 Dash*, and sales were so high. I mean the game cost around ¥150,000 or ¥160,000 [£820] and we sold about 140,000 of them. I can't even imagine such numbers now. We were selling arcade games as consumer games. Can you imagine? 140,000 units. At the same time copies started to flow in. When these copies were coming in great numbers from overseas, we had some feedback with people delighted by the high speed action of versions in



Spectacular thematic scrolling backgrounds were made possible thanks to Capcom's new CPS-1 board

Hong Kong for instance. So we decided to make the *Turbo* version – we called it *Turbo* because it was faster." Recalling the increasingly strained titles – *Hyper Fighting*, *Dash*, *Championship*, *Super*, *Turbo*, and so on – of the hundreds of cross-system *Street Fighter* tweaks and spin-offs, Funamizu-san grins. "I tried to make sense of the titles back then."

Halcyon days

And that brings more 16bit romanticism. "Those days were much more interesting than now. I mean many new things were possible. Now we are focused in making huge projects, costing a lot of money, ¥500 million [£2.6m] or ¥1.5 billion [£7.9m]. Adventure is not possible any more. Of course we were naive, and we got low salaries thanks to the company head, but we had this incredible sense of adventure you don't find today. Well, maybe it's not that impossible, but the meaning of adventure is different, faded."

Thankfully, some things don't lose their colour. Those who've experienced the recent *Revival* on the Game Boy Advance – those obsessives who've memorised the combos, who can't put their hand on the D-pad without twisting it through quarter rotations – they will testify. *Street Fighter II* shines brightly, shines like ↓↘→●. Shines like a fireball.



RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 44, April 1997

Ecoutez et répétez: E44's cover heralded 'The New Wave' of French development – which, from **Edge**'s point of view, meant nipping across the Channel for a pleasant spring break on the continent. Bordeaux developer Kalisto showed off *Nightmare Creatures* and *Dark Earth*, while a visit to Infogrames brought previews of *V-Rally* and *Outcast*. **Edge**'s strict work ethic left them unimpressed with their hosts' hometown ("There's a certain air of, how shall we put it, 'laissez-faire'."), but perhaps the most frightening part of the whole piece came in the strapline: "**Edge** returns to Lyon to discover the true extent of Infogrames' new-found global ambitions." If only they knew...

Only a chat with Treasure's Masato Maegawa provided real gaming interest in an uninspiring month. A Prescreen Alpha of *Interstate '76* showed some passion, though not towards the game: "At the moment it looks like the video to the Spice Girls' 'Say You'll Be There'," said **Edge**, "but hopefully the game will be more like 'Mad Max' meets *Destruction Derby* than ex-topless model meets mouthy northern bints." We'll take it that **Edge** preferred All Saints, then.



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"It made sense for us to merge and gain a strong presence in Europe and, next, in the United States." Bruno Bonnell comments on the Infogrames/Ocean merger, and hints at his next strategic target.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

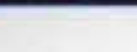
"A lame paperback which gives you the impression that the writer is an academic struggling to master a word processor" and "An idiot's guide to philosophy dressed up in unspeakably clichéd novelistic underwear" – **Edge** gives some savage literary critique of 'Sophie's World'.

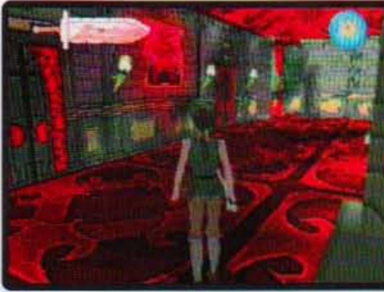
TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Porsche Challenge (PS; 8/10), *FIFA 64* (N64; 5/10), *Tenka* (PS; 7/10), *Manx TT* (Saturn; 7/10), *Sentient* (PS; 6/10), *Commanche 3* (PC; 7/10), *Kick Off 97* (PC; 7/10), *Excalibur 2555AD* (PS; 6/10), *Theme Hospital* (PC; 8/10), *Sangoku Musou* (PS; 6/10), *F1* (PC; 8/10)



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1. *Sentient*: "A thriller that isn't particularly thrilling" 2. *Excalibur 2555AD* and its suspiciously familiar pony-tailed heroine 3. "You think Bowser's a fire-breathing monster? You should see my mother-in-law..." Bob Monkhouse at the UK N64 launch party. 4. Masato Maegawa, CEO of Treasure 5. A Prescreen appearance of a young Abe 6. Early 'net gaming in *Planetary Raiders*

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, James Lisle, game designer at Namco (Japan), remembers his first onscreen halfpipe





Pure skateboarding, not videogames, brought Lisle into the game design fold

The game that first grabbed my attention was the skateboarding sim *Skate or Die*. Up until then I had little interest in videogames, but when I heard it was available for test-play at a show in London, off I went. Said game was there, and I bought a Game Boy solely to get down to some digital shredding.

Granted, it completely failed to live up to my expectations, but the limited halfpipe mode offered some freedom. You could do a few simple tricks and create your own lines by performing different stunts on each wall of the pipe. Ultimately, though, I was looking for more. Then, on the way out of the show, I noticed a small stand with this strange colourful new game from Japan being demonstrated; it enabled you to pick up a feather and fly, take a ride on a funky green dinosaur and explore what appeared to be a countless number of stages. All the freedom and variety I was looking for from a skateboarding game was here. The game, of course, was Super *Mario World*. From the start it presents an interesting environment, and enables you to experiment and have fun, while at the same time guiding you towards a final objective. It was the first game to keep me thoroughly entertained. Now, of course, we have *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, but you still can't knock *Super Mario World*.

FAQ

Susumu Matsushita
artist, Dream Ranch Inc

Having finished work on *Maximo*'s 40 characters and completed his recent immigration to London (where he's set up a western branch of his company), Matsushita-san kindly gathered his crayons to create this issue's striking cover art. When not liaising with **Edge**'s art team, he continues to craft fine images for the Tokyo-based Famitsu magazine group – every month, gamers in his homeland usually get to see his work in (and often on the front of) seven different publications.

What was the first videogame you played?
Chess.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
A Sony MSX.

Can you remember the first thing you ever drew?
A dinosaur.

What was your first job in your industry?
I had to create illustrations for the musical 'Showgirls'.

What was the first thing/character you created (in a professional capacity)?
A Mac Bear cover for the comic magazine, 'Young Jump'.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
I don't really have one single favourite game but rather several: *Xevious* – I was fascinated with the amazingly beautiful 3D looking graphics when I first came across it in the arcade; *Solomon's Key* – great music and adventurous thrills even though it's a puzzle game; *Family Stadium* (like *RBI*) – because I love baseball games; *Tetris* – this game inspired me to buy a Game Boy; *Battle Arena Toshinden* – as the images are excellent; *Puzzle Bobble* – there are elements like billiards in this and it's much more entertaining than *Tetris* – I still take a Wonder Swan with me to the bathroom.

Do you have a favourite game character?
Tomb Raider's Lara Croft and Chun Li of the *Street Fighter* games.

What do you think of western game character design?
I think it's excellent even though I am not so fond of realistic designs.

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Biohazard. It's scary.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
About 14 hours.

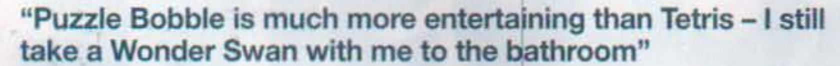
What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
The 'Harry Potter' series. Anything by The Shadows, Cliff Richard or Frank Sinatra. Movies: 'Jason & The Argonauts', 'The Iron Giant' and 'The Natural'.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
www.yahoo.co.jp

Is there a particular comic book series (western or Japanese) you would have liked to have worked on?
'Wonder 3' and 'Zero Man' created by Osamu Tezuka, and I would have liked to have created the covers for the 'Harry Potter' book series.

Of all the projects you've been involved in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
Maximo because I could finally come up with the exact characters I'd imagined.

You're perhaps best known in the west for your Necky the Fox 'Weekly Famitsu' covers. How long do these take to create?
It takes a day to do the rough sketch and three to four days for colouring in the final work.



How do you approach these – where does your inspiration come from?
I receive a brief from the editorial department and I then play with a number of ideas that I feel fit [the theme of that particular issue].

Other than magazine covers, you've also previously worked on the artistic aspects of videogames such as *Shadows of the Tusk*, *Motor Toon GP* and, most recently, *Maximo*. How have you found the experience?
I was amazed that the evolution of videogame systems now finally allows what I previously only imagined possible.



Which aspect of *Maximo* do you think will impress players the most?
Its story, free-flowing gameplay, mysterious though beautiful images and, of course, attractive characters.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
I would like to see game creators use their imagination more.

Is there anything that disappoints you about the games industry in particular?
Concept discrepancy.

What do you enjoy most about working with the videogame industry?
It's fun – I mean when I imagine what kind of game will be created, and when the characters that used to be on paper are suddenly alive in the game.

Whose work do you most admire and why (videogame and comic book art)?
Generally speaking, creators of popular videogames. But specifically, Frank Frazetta, a fantasy/science fiction painter and Bruce Timm, a character designer for 'Batman'.

Which new gaming platform are you most looking forward to and why?
Newly developed machines with more advanced technology and wireless controllers. While I am not familiar with console technology, I would like to see more design thought go into the aesthetic look of the machine.

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

How is it that Japan and the Far East get the Xbox for £182.69, the US gets it for £207.89 and even Australia gets it for £234.65, while we Europeans, the third largest market in the world, have to pay almost £300, 50 per cent up on the Japanese? Now I recognise that this argument comes up every time a console is launched, but the reason I am so peeved over the Xbox is that ours will be a European build, made in Europe.

Yes, I understand it isn't as cheap to build in Europe as in the States and Japan, but the fact that we have to wait almost two extra months for a machine that would be dead in the water in the US and Japan at the price point we are expected to swallow, that has been specially built for the European market, and yet still is so much more expensive than our global neighbours, is disturbing for a company trying to break into the market. I find it strange that a company so fixed on gaining market share has missed one of the key points, pricing, and particularly fair pricing, sells machines. On this I shall leave the point, but I would like to hope we will get a 33 per cent better build on our machines for our money. I suspect we won't.
Phill Adams

This side of summer, £150 launch price, 20 titles at launch, optional 60Hz mode on PAL screens… I can't believe this is a Nintendo console we're talking about! Could you please tell myself and the many other **Edge** readers what the catch is? This all sounds far too benevolent for the Nintendo we know and love. Seriously though, the price point and the line-up of fantastic games has settled it for me. It was between Nintendo and Microsoft, and I didn't really fancy getting blue screens of death in the middle of a quick go of *Unreal Championship*.
Dale

Well done Nintendo. Finally, a major hardware company that has realised that it's not acceptable to simply swap a dollar sign for a pound sign when selling their wares in this country.

Taking into account the sales tax added to the $199 GameCube in most states in the US (anywhere between zero and ten per cent), we are actually pretty much even for a change.

Using this as an example of a console made outside Europe and imported into the UK, how can Microsoft justify an Xbox that was made in Europe being sold in the UK at £300, when the same console is being sold in Japan at the equivalent of £180?

I don't advocate buying a console just because it's cheap, if the games aren't there to back it up, so I hope Nintendo is able to produce the gaming goods to go with this brilliant marketing strategy. Hopefully the comparative sales figures could make all sorts of companies in the UK realise that if the product is good enough, charging less equals more sales, and the same end result.
James Woodhead

Sadly, it looks as if Nintendo's UK pricing strategy will be undermined by retailers – who seem to be the real bad guys here. Microsoft simply seems to have come up with a price that is more attractive to the retail community.

Before the critical remarks commence, it would only be right to say that I have the utmost respect for the honesty and integrity that is so apparent in every **Edge** review. However, I do have to comment on your review of *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. While I agree that this game doesn't exactly offer the most innovative gameplay the PC has ever seen, I would say that it provides some of the most atmospheric. I can't argue that the first two levels could almost have been pulled straight from *Wolfenstein 3D* (with all the retro gameplay characteristics that implies), and the first boss is a complete joke. Where I do question your review score concerns the excellent variety of locations (all of them graphically superb), the impressive animation of the German soldiers, convincing AI, and a wonderful sense of atmosphere (that almost indefinable quality that really makes the player feel immersed in the game). I accept that the supernatural aspects of the game are not quite as impressive as engaging in shootouts with the Third Reich's finest (probably due to their lack of credibility), but they do add a spooky element to the gameplay.

Overall I think that *Wolfenstein* deserved a higher score than **Edge** granted it, if for no other reason than it is a decidedly better game than *Max Payne*. I won't waste your time by suggesting what that score should have been, since the comments above are purely subjective. What I would add here is that *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* is probably the most enjoyable FPS that I have played since *Half-Life* (not including the majestic *Deus Ex*), and that in itself is recommendation enough.
Chris Low

While **Edge** strives to offer definitive reviews, there there will always be scope for disagreement when in comes to the relative merits of any game. We considered *RtCW* to be a competent title. But the fact that you didn't shouldn't diminish your enjoyment of the game, or the rest of the magazine.

While revisiting the wonderful world of *Jet Set Radio* the other day, a thought struck me. I love this game just as much for its music as I do for the graphics, originality and style. Nearly all of the games regarded as classics have had some top-notch musical accompaniment to go with their gameplay and graphical flair; from the NES *Marios* to the *Starwing* tune, through to *Ocarina of Time's* wonderful orchestral tunes. Such tunes have something in common; their eminent 'hummability' and their ability to pervade the subconscious and to incorporate themselves into our daily lives away from games. Perhaps that's due to their quality, or perhaps it's to do with their exposure to the listener. After all, most people spend significantly longer completing games than they're willing to listen to an album for.

When I first heard of Xbox's ability to 'rip' music

> "How can Microsoft justify an Xbox that was made in Europe being sold in the UK at £300, when the same console is being sold in Japan at the equivalent of £180?"



Do games such as *Jet Set Radio* present a counter argument to customised in-game music? Dan Abels certainly seems to think so. **Edge** isn't so sure

from audio CDs and play that instead of pre-set game music, I thought, "Wow, what a novel feature." Now though, I'm not so sure. Could it be that the new generation of gamers coming to the Xbox will simply opt to hear their favourite albums instead of sampling the audio laid out by the developer's musicians?

I'm not denying the feature gives light to some interesting combinations; *Unreal Tournament* and Mozart, or *Super Monkey Ball* to Heavy Metal would be great; but rhythm-action games would need to have some kind of lock-out or else render the title virtually unplayable to someone using their own music, and game audio could become less important critically as the player can just skip the rushed or unfinished sound, and utilise their own CD collection. So then, Xbox's audio CD ripability; "About time" or "Not in my time"?
Dan Abels

As you correctly point out, the ability to customise a videogame's soundtrack isn't always desirable (though *Vib Ribbon* would suggest that rhythm action games can benefit). But the ability to 'rip' your own music, on some occasions at least, grants Xbox owners an extra degree of freedom and choice, which must be a good thing.

I have to say I'm all for using emulators these days to play a game or two, but there's just something extra special about owning a 'real' version of a game – take, for example, the other day: on a whim, I bought a copy of the SNES classic *Mario Kart* for three quid. It brought back the memory of buying it the first time round (a snip at £60 when I used to get £1 pocket money a week) I'm sure my fingers were trembling when I put the cart into the console. When did I last get that excited about an emulated game... or any game for that matter? *Gran Turismo*? No. *Mario 64*? I don't think so, but I'm not sure. Perhaps it's the fast-approaching-thirty-but-still-loves-games geek in me but it is nice owning a small piece of gaming history. Now to keep my eyes open for a copy of *Skool Daze* on tape.
Richard Evans

A comment made by Noritaka Funamizu in your 'Auto Modellista' article (**E**106) persuaded me to contact you and put forth my opinion on the online future of PS2. The article briefly mentioned that the title would more than likely not ship with online support in Europe. Reason? "Too many regional standards." With this comment in mind, my opinion is that online support for PS2 is dead and buried before it's even been conceived. Reason? Well, for a start there are the language problems. Also, you have the classic 'console add-on syndrome' where PS2 owners will have to purchase an additional modem unit in order to take advantage of any online functions in games. But, there is also a third reason, and one that was highlighted in your Dreamcast obituary (**E**105). Dreamcast had a modem out-of-the-box, but only 33 per cent and 15 per cent of Dreamcast users in Europe and US respectively subscribed to Dream Arena (and God knows how many of them were regular users).

You can, if you wish, introduce a fourth and fifth reason – AOL & Telewest. The former is well known in the PC community for providing a less than satisfactory service (as well as that annoying woman in the television commercials), while the latter is more associated with sitting around waiting for an engineer to arrive (plus, Microsoft has a stake in it). To summarise, I can't see how Sony expects the online functionality of PS2 to be successful. I have seen no evidence (via **Edge**) that makes me feel confident that it will arrive on time, if at all, and with the necessary software and support. Instead, I have seen more bloated hype and promises that serve as a reminder to us all as to how this industry has survived for so long.
Chris Marsh

The videogame industry isn't alone in having been caught up in broadband euphoria, and certainly analysts and forecasters seem now to be waking up to the fact that it's going to take longer to arrive than anticipated. But it's worth pointing out that Sony itself has been sounding a note of caution, and that both it and Microsoft are currently working hard to make the technology a reality.

While RedEye may lament the "perpetuation of the view of videogame fans as a nerdy, know-all, male-dominated, clique", he must feel a little betrayed that his employer saw fit to run the piece next to the 'Lust List' advert.

Strikingly presided over by a leather-stilletoed, santa-hatted, cleavage parading, sex-kitten – I am at a loss to know quite what this, admittedly delectable morsel, has to do with a middleware engine, other than her appeal to nerdy, know-all males. What she most certainly does not do is redress the stereotypical image we have of game fans and developers. Nice own goal chaps, anyone care to put their hand up for that one?
Rupert Breheny

Criterion?

I think that the lack of a standard system is one of the many things that holds videogaming back as a completely accepted entertainment form. Not only does it mark out the ridiculous partisan nature of many 'gaming' fans (I use the term loosely, for a true fan embraces great games regardless of the host system), which adds to its juvenile image, but it continues to create confusion among mainstream buyers.

When people buy a film on DVD they know it's going to work on their player. It doesn't matter which studio produced the film, or what company manufactured their particular player. They are safe in the knowledge of what they have bought. Not so with gaming. Casual consumers the world over are baffled by the choice. The dominance of PlayStation made it acceptable because it was so identifiable, people came to associate gaming with that brand.

It's a well known fact that the money in gaming

"In less than five years we're going to be on this new format merry-go-round again, the possibility of three more boxes to find a place for is becoming more of an unfunny joke"



Jim Le Fevre advocates an art school approach, to allow budding game designers to explore and extend the limits of gameplay's 'grammar'

comes from software rather than hardware sales, so wouldn't it better suit Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft to come up with a standard and then concentrate their efforts towards software for it? By franchising out a standard system they could simultaneously cut out heavy licensing fees, and allow everybody to make more profit from their own titles. Sega had the humility (and good sense) to bow out of the hardware market, and I sincerely hope it reaps great rewards for it – as long as it produces worthy games.

In less than five years we're going to be on this new format merry-go-round again, and the possibility of at least three more boxes to find a place for is becoming more of an unfunny joke. Though a standard system would need upgrading every few years (as the industry is technology-driven, developers would demand it. I don't buy the idea that one system would stifle creativity and progress at all), it's a lot better than this mess we're in now, and if it remained backward-compatible it would be even less of a problem.

I know I'm dreaming of an ideal here, and it's not going to happen. But it does seem clearly obvious to me that a standard is needed for this industry to 'grow up' and meets its cousins on equal terms.

Stephen Brealey

I'm currently an animation director and have had a burning passion to one day cross over to the gaming side of life. Two years ago there was a series of seminars at BAFTA House in Piccadilly about narrative and the digital age and, although it was mainly directed towards film makers, there was a representative from Sony PlayStation there who spoke very interestingly on narrative frameworks and structures and how people are continually trying to strive for the non-linear/linear balance where choices are no longer an insurmountable problem. The result of this, was my wondering if there was an 'arts' market for games?

As an animator the whole structure from art college out into the real world involves making short films to show your basic skills and tastes in either animation, aesthetics, narrative, humour and/or direction (and more) and there are forums for these in the form of festivals. However, what is intriguing is that there are so many different genres of films even in the relatively small world of animation and that for each college there are between eight and 30 people per graduating year all making different films from abstract to 'humourous' but all exploring and creating a different 'grammar' and approach.

Last year I entered into the GBdev (Game Boy Development) community which consisted of people programming from home/as a hobby and posting their experiments on the Web. After downloading a GB emulator I was amazed to see how creative the small 'unusable' programmes they had made were and how exciting they were with the added factor of 'interaction' even in a base and simple way of moving an object around a screen.

More recently I have been sent a trial run of *DarkBasic*, a fairly rudimentary but quite fun 3D games creation kit and my play around tests are beginging to coming up with the most simple but fun little things which don't technically constitute 'games' but are fairly enjoyable seeds for thought and as pleasing to 'play' with as a card trick or a clockwork toy.

I guess my point is, is there a community of people exploring the basics of gameplay in the same way that art college students explore the basics of film making? And is there such a thing as an 'abstract' game in the same way we have abstract films (especially in animation)?

Jim Le Fevre

There seems to be a lot of negative thought at the moment regarding the quality of storytelling in games. Most games have hackneyed plots revolving around the old 'good guy fights against the odds to rescue princess from big bad evil guy/save kingdom from big bad evil guy/defeat big bad evil guy.' It is a genuine rarity to find a character with even one dimension, let alone a believable person with whom the player can relate. Most of the dialogue is unbelievable nonsense.

And do you know what? I say it's great. Let's face it, if you want all these things, read a book or watch a film. If you want to interact with your entertainment (the whole point of playing a computer game, surely), then you'll have to contend with the computer not being able to accurately emulate human emotions/reactions and interpersonal relationships. When games do try to incorporate a 'proper' story, we end up with a strictly linear experience, in which one might as well be on a rollercoaster for all the freedom we have.

I don't want stories in games. They never come off and are completely against the whole idea of gaming. Take one of the (arguably) best games ever, *Super Mario 64*. The plot is 'princess captured by Bowser. Go rescue her.' But was anyone really worried about recuing the princess when trying to beat the penguin down the slide? I, for one, was too wrapped up in the fun of the game to worry about the plot. *Crazy Taxi*, the best 'quick fix' ever has 'you are a taxi driver' as its back story.

So I say forget the plot developments (because, damn it, the player should be in charge of what happens in the game) and the characterisations (Mario isn't the star of the games, rather the environments he explores are). Depth can be found in interaction, not sitting back and watching another cut-scene.

Nicholas Aldridge

While the points you raise are certainly valid, and widely endorsed within the games industry, one of the advantages of videogames is that they represent a broad enough medium to encompass a wide range of experiences – from resolutely plot free, to unremittingly plot driven; from the febrile joy of *Super Monkey Ball* to the more languorous enjoyment of *Broken Sword*. Either way, everybody's happy.

"When games do try to incorporate a 'proper' story, we end up with a strictly linear experience, in which one might as well be on a rollercoaster for all the freedom we have"





Nicholas Aldridge opposes the apparent obsession with narrative in games, but don't story-driven games merely offer an alternative to twitch gaming?

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **Journos vs. Games designers: FIGHT!**
Poster: **smac**
Who do you reckon knows more about games and game mechanics in general: a typical games designer, or a typical games journalist? Or, to avoid pejorative interpretations of 'typical', who needs to know more about games?

I only ask because I was wondering what kind of **Edge** journo I would make, and I realised that I'm not sure if I have enough experience – I just haven't played enough recent games. Forgetting about the ability to write engaging prose, I'd hazard a guess that most people in here reckon they could do either job (and one or two might reckon they would make a better job than some of the incumbents). So, whaddya think the difference is?

And who would win in a gaming trivia quiz night? Journo or games designer?

Poster: **Rev. Stuart Campbell**
Any journalist with decent analytical skills (which, to be fair, is almost none of them) has, essentially, all the works of every game designer at their disposal, knowledge-wise. As a designer, on the other hand, you (a) spend a vast amount of time devoted to producing a single game, with little time to experience any others, and (b) often end up so close to your own game that you're not even equipped to make a rational decision about it, never mind anyone else's. (I ended up making *Cannon Fodder 2* so hard even I can't get past about Level 4 now.)

Development, sadly, is rarely the explosion of creative expression it would be, in an ideal world. Often it's frankly just an assembly-line job – churn out another football/racing/*Tomb Raider* clone by the deadline. (Again, this is often true of magazine production too, but in the same amount of time you can't help but take in a lot more information, even if you're a total bonehead.)

Poster: **Quexex**
I agree with Stu's comments on getting to close to a product during development making it too hard, not seeing the obvious, etc. I've been there and done that, but it's a mistake you only tend to make once. I'd challenge the **Edge** team to come and make a cliché-free game, with excellent design principles but on time, on budget, and adhering to strict marketing guidelines – which are the killers of all good concepts. Believe me if there is any one discipline responsible for the shit that gets released it's marketing; if they can't understand it, they can't sell it and they can't understand much and they don't play much.

Poster: **simongwynne**
This is an interesting topic, and it makes me wonder how the gaming industry compares to other industries. I don't work in the games industry, but I did spend a good few years working in the music business, and the relationship between 'artistes' and journalists is turbulent to say the least. Most journalists are failed musicians. Not all, but most. What this created (in my day at least), was a group of relatively powerful individuals bearing huge grudges. Pub quizzes were an ideal opportunity for the journalists to invite their musician 'friends' out and humiliate them. The gaming journalists seem to be a lot friendlier, displaying genuine respect for designers, which they should.

Poster: **Tokuda**
At university, my mate and I always used to play a lot of games – he was just as into his games as I was. But since he began working for a devco, he's almost completely given up on playing games – the reasons being lack of time (his deadline is in the offing) as well as the fact that if you deal with games all day, the last thing you'd want to do, is unwind by... playing more games.

Topic: **Finally! A decent FFX review.**
Poster: **Mr Bump**
I really didn't get on with *FFX* – I played both the Japanese version and more recently (thinking maybe my poor Japanese was the reason I disliked it so) the US version. And I could find very little to like about the game. I was sure that I wasn't the only one who felt this way, but all the US forums seemed to be only filled with praise – dare mention that you didn't think much of it and take your Internet life in your hands.

I was starting to think maybe there was something wrong with me. Maybe, if I couldn't enjoy this 'amazing, innovative game' I was losing my love for videogames and would be wearing slippers and smoking a pipe within a year.

But then **Edge** came along and set things straight. Pretty much everything that was said in the review was how I felt about the game – it was wonderful to hear someone tell it like it is without fear of the consequences. Of course, now everyone is accusing **Edge** of giving *FFX* a low score just to cause controversy – to raise their profile worldwide – it's certainly causing a stir on various US forums. But I know this isn't the case. That review was like a ray of light – now I know I needn't get that cardigan just yet.

Topic: **Xbox advert in E107**
Poster: **Method**
... if that's pubic hair in the soap, then that is frigging disgusting.

Poster: **Vertigo**
It also meant I couldn't read AV Out on the train.

Topic: **Next month's Edge**
Poster: **daninski**
... judging from the back page it looks like *Cool Spot* is the centre of attention next month.

"I'd challenge the **Edge** team to come and make a cliché-free game, with excellent design principles but on time, on budget, and adhering to strict marketing guidelines"

Next month

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away




Jet Set Radio Future (Xbox)
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Virtua Fighter 4 (PlayStation2)
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Vexx (Xbox, PS2, GC)
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Herdy Gerdy (PlayStation2)
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